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NOTES  
FOR A BOOK  
ABOUT MEXICO



# NOTES FOR A BOOK ABOUT MEXICO

*By* HOWARD VINCENT O'BRIEN



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*To*

FRANK KNOX



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## *Foreword*

Before writing a book about a country, one should study its history, geography and language. Then, after taking a course of lectures in its art, archaeology and economics, one should arm himself with letters to leaders of thought and, finally, take up residence for at least a year.

I have done none of those things. I came to Mexico wholly unequipped, having read little about it and forgotten most of that. I knew only a few words of Spanish — mostly irrelevant.

I met few important people, my contacts being chiefly with clerks, porters, policemen, taxi drivers and small children. I came with no convictions, except that the Mexicans were a gay and lazy lot, likely to be disagreeable to Americans. I left with no conclusions except that the Mexicans were the precise opposite of all I had feared they would be.

What follows in these pages was written for newspaper publication, and I have resisted the temptation to benefit by hindsight. It remains what it was — a day-by-day record, often hastily composed, of two months below the Rio Grande. It is, of course, notably inaccurate, superficial and repetitious. I only hope it proves sufficiently irritating to make its readers want to go and see for themselves.

THE AUTHOR

London, May 1, 1937



NOTES  
FOR A BOOK  
ABOUT MEXICO



## *Strictly Tourist*

Already I speak English with a faint accent and address my consort as *señora*. Already the sweetbreads which serve me as a brain are slightly addled by the effort to remember how many pesos make — or should make — a dollar. Already the busy fretful life of the north seems strangely remote and my natural aptitude for indolence is ready to show what it can do.

I am assailed by grave problems. There is, first, the question of what guise shall be mine on my visit to Mexico. Valentine Williams, author and international gadabout, was just in for a chat, and he assured me that it was fatal to travel anywhere with papers revealing the carrier as a journalist. "I always go as 'gentleman,'" he said. "That may err slightly on the side of accuracy; but it saves time and red tape. Nobody loves a journalist."

Mexico presents a peculiar problem. Once a tourist has obtained a card stating that he is a tourist, he is "expressly unable to change his tourist status while he is in the republic of Mexico." Once he deviates from being occupied solely with pleasure, he will, says the card, "be subject to an adequate punishment."

That, of course, settles it. If anyone wants to know why I am going to Mexico, the answer is — given in no uncertain voice — PLEASURE. As part of my pleasure I shall write a daily letter about what I see and hear; but I want it distinctly understood that I write only for fun, and that at all hours of the day and night I am strictly a tourist.

Thinking that my managing editor should understand this, and not be troubled should any of my letters fail to arrive, I told him all about my resolve to cease being a journalist and become a tourist, if not a "gentleman." He took it lightly, assuring me that as far as he had been able to judge I had always been a tourist, and that the word "journalist" gave him visceral pains, anyway.

That problem settled, there remains only the problem of letters of introduction. I hesitate to use them, but hesitancy is always overcome by the reflection that one of my best friends was made by this means. And I shall try to visit all the quaint spots that people have recommended. Most of all, I shall establish contact with a police official, to whom I have a letter, and with a couple of newspapermen. Guided by a cop and a pair of newshawks, one can't go far wrong.

And now for the final sweep of papers from the desk and the packing of the battered old suitcase. This last will entail a slight domestic scene, it never having been settled in our home which of us takes the most stuff that is never used. Then, while the taxi clicks at the door, there will be the usual last-minute effort to cram into a bag more things than it was designed to hold; and the inevitable strap or buckle will give way. Also, as usual, there will be the discovery that one's careful listing of the number of pieces of baggage does not include the extra parcels. And finally, with the usual sinking feeling, and the certainty that something important has been forgotten, we shall be off.

All aboard for New Spain! See you at Sanborn's.

## *Toward the Hot Tamale*

As I speed swiftly over the flat wet plains, sage green and russet, of the incredibly vast empire we stole from Mexico, my thoughts are again on the endless conflict between our principles and our habits. We ride in Pullmans, but much of our thinking is still at the oxcart stage. And no sooner do we catch up with one piece of machinery than another is devised to plague us.

Consider, for example, the electric razor. Seduced by advertising, one tries it; and then, hardly knowing it, one becomes a slave to progress. Smooth the addict's way, and smooth his features, as long as he has access to an electric circuit into which he can plug. But woe to him when he boards a railroad train. His gadget, so excellent in the domestic scene, will not work on the lower voltage of a Pullman. He must either buy one specially designed for this purpose, which is extravagant and silly; or he must revert to the razor which cuts instead of clips, the brutal edge which bites into flesh as well as hair. Tenderly caressing a face which smarts and stings from treatment to which it has long been unaccustomed, I sit pondering the reputed advantages of invention. I am not sure that they are what they are said to be.

With baggage piled high on the opposite seat, my typewriter on my lap, other bags underfoot and the surplus flowing in a disordered stream into the aisle, I meditate also on the inventive genius of Mr. Pullman. Progress seems to have ceased with him, and the upper berth is practically as he left

it. Oddly enough, the uppers fetch less than the lowers, though they are demonstrably less uncomfortable. The springing is better, there is some ventilation, and the feat of inserting legs into trousers can be performed with somewhat less hazard.

There is one notable change in railway travel. This is the "smoking" — now called the "club" — car. Women have invaded this domain, and with their usurpation has come a striking change in outward appearance. Cretonnes and chromium have replaced mahogany and brown leather. The conversation has changed, too, and the so-called smoking-car anecdote has vanished under the pressure of what Dr. Johnson called "the endearing elegance of female companionship."

The railroads, after being badly mauled by competition, seem to be getting a second wind. Attacked on one flank by the airplane and on the other by the motorcar — with its lusty nephew, the trailer — the railroads are making a counter-offensive of some vigor. They are now offering more speed and comfort, and asking less for them. Among many novelties, they are taking the first steps toward the checking of motorcars as baggage; and they are giving the trucks something to think about in their free pickup and delivery of freight. In all this they are hampered by three things: government regulation — some of it wise and necessary, some of it a nuisance; the crushing burden of bonded indebtedness; and the uncompromising attitude of labor. Meanwhile one thing is certain — railway travel is rapidly increasing. For safety and certainty it is still tops in transportation.

So much for the thoughts that flit through an empty head as the telegraph poles dance by on their way to the land of the hot tamale.

In the next car are a soda fountain and the latest magazines.

For those who insist on keeping up with events, there is a radio. I am not a customer. I am content to recline, doze a little, dip occasionally into my Spanish phrase book, and congratulate myself that I have no tires to change, no way to lose and no doubts as to where I shall spend the night. I feel rather sorry for the motorists I catch glimpses of on the highways.

## *Serious Business*

Practically everything I have heard about the difficulties of entering Mexico proves to be false.

In San Antonio a supposedly well informed person recounted horrendous tales about the ingenious pestiferousness of the Mexican customs. He assured me that baggage must be taken from the train at Nuevo Laredo, and that after being meticulously examined it was sealed, not to be opened again until the next morning. He also gave alarming details of the perils of money-changing.

Having been maltreated by the customs inspectors of many lands — notably my own — I was resigned to the worst. However, nothing happened. First a courteous immigration officer summoned us to the lounge car, where tourist cards were signed and stamped. Then the customs inspectors came through the train. Fate gave us a businesslike young woman dressed in pale blue rayon, who, after a briefly expert appraisal of our effects, affixed the Mexican equivalent of o. k. and passed on.

Not so fortunate was a Mexican across the aisle. His examination lasted an hour or more and his bill was considerable. As he explained to us sadly, if you carry female garments in your bags but have no wife with you, you are presumed to be a smuggler, and pay accordingly.

I have been in Mexico only a few hours, but I have already learned one lesson. Nowhere does politeness pay such dividends. The Mexicans are extremely sensitive to ridicule or patronage. Treat them respectfully, offering no affront to

dignity, and distinguished consideration will be yours. Treat them with condescension, indicate your belief that you are of a superior breed, and thorny will be your path. From my observation so far, pretty-please and gentle manners smooth all roads, while curtness and derision make for a course exceedingly rough.

Strange as it may seem, the Mexican official has high regard for his uniform and the position it symbolizes. He resents what he considers impropriety. A woman on our train was sharply rebuked for smoking a cigarette while her passport was being examined. To the tourist, puffed up with vainglory at being that noblest of the works of God, an American, these formalities may seem the humorous play of children; but to the Mexican, remembering ancestors who were important centuries before the Pilgrims were heard of, they are serious business, to be treated as such.

I have spent the morning in talk with an American businessman who lived for many years in Mexico and still has a home there. From him I gleaned some interesting things about this land which is so near to us geographically, yet so far away in all other respects.

It is a mistake to think of Mexico as a Latin country, merely because its language is Spanish. It is an Indian country, over which has been laid a thin veneer of European architecture and custom. A handful of Spanish adventurers conquered it, and until something over a century ago Spain ruled and plundered it. But the Spanish domination never bit deep into the fiber of the people, and today there is a lively renaissance of the Indian way of life.

A large part of the population lives primitively now, but their ancestors were masters of a high degree of civilization when Plymouth Rock was just a rock. When you are tempted

to speak of Mexicans as "spiggoties" or "greasers," just remember that books were printed in Mexico at least a hundred years before they were in what is now the U. S. A.

The present trend of things is said to be communistic, and one is told that this is of Russian origin. In fact, however, the communistic trend dates from a far more ancient model. The Indian society has always been communal, if not communistic, and the economic program of the present government is an outgrowth of something that was old long before Trotzky and Lenin made their appearance.

Here is the battlefield of great forces. Here the law of the Romans and the law of the Anglo-Saxons come to grips. By the former, for example, one can own only the *surface* of land, and whatever can be dug or pumped from it is the property of crown or state. You can see what that means to the claims of oil and mining interests.

But it is too hot for such weighty thinking, and my siesta time is here. Outside, the desert bakes in the hot sunshine, and the natives — the few to be seen — doze in shadowed doorways. Far away the Cordilleras shimmer faintly against the pale blue sky. Even the cattle and the pigs are at rest, and no buzzard is to be seen a-wing. The porter, dreaming no doubt of Iturbide and Montezuma, is asleep in one corner of the car, the conductor in another. There seems to be no movement in the world. Only the train keeps pounding along, at what appears to be slower speed each hour.

I hope the engineer is not taking a siesta, too!

## *Land of Manners*

The last miles were the hardest for our train and it was well past midnight when we arrived in the capital of the Aztecs. With vague ideas of the city of Mexico as a town of narrow streets, paved with cobbles or not at all, through which strolled picturesque figures in sombrero and serape, with perhaps a cathedral and an opera house and a tram line to give a touch of modernism, it was disconcerting to find stoplights and neon signs and office buildings towering against the sky, and to see that the people on the streets were for the most part dressed precisely as they would be on Broadway or Piccadilly.

The capital of Mexico is a big city — larger than Atlanta, Chattanooga, Dayton, Syracuse and Omaha rolled into one.

But figures mean little and, in the case of this amazing city, neither do words. It must be experienced. As I dropped off to sleep this morning, in as completely equipped a hotel as one may find in this world, I could hear, above the squawking of the motor horns on the boulevard outside, the crowing of a cock from somewhere near by. Thus the old and the new live contentedly side by side.

If I were asked to specify what has struck me most forcibly, so far, about life in Mexico, I would answer promptly: its superb manners. From the bootblack upward the courtesy encountered has been notable. The amiability of the Mexican is not servile. A servant will accept a tip, but he does not act as if he expected it. Those who fetch your water and carry your bags do everything with dignity. Even the ragged creatures who try to sell you things on the street exhibit the

same gravity. They are neither persistent nor obsequious. It is difficult to explain, but you cannot be here an hour without feeling it.

If the mahogany-colored peon in cotton drawers and sandals made of discarded tires is a model of gentle manners, one simply breaks down when one tries to find words for the politeness of the educated upper class. It makes a *Norteamericano* acutely and uncomfortably conscious of his own brusque ways. It makes him feel crude and loutish, and no matter what a boor he may be by nature it is amazing to see how quickly he yields to the example set him by Mexicans, high and low.

I suppose I should wait to blow the trumpet for Mexico until I have seen more of it. But at the moment I want to urge everyone who can afford it to buy a ticket. And it is worth mentioning that the rate of exchange makes a trip to Mexico a real travel bargain. At the present rate the peso is worth about twenty-eight cents. And for life in Mexico the peso buys about what a dollar does in the U. S. A.

That is, if you buy goods made in Mexico and do not go in heavily for luxuries, you can live well on little. The Mexicans, however, believe in soaking the rich. Thus meals on our dining car carried a 10 per cent tax. According to the economic philosophy of Mexico, anyone who can afford to eat in a dining car can afford to pay a stiff tax. So it is that if you can do with cotton stockings you can have them for little, but if you demand silk stockings you pay through the nose. If you insist on American cigarettes you must pay dearly for them, but you can have a Mexican cigarette, the "Vir-heenya," to spell it phonetically—to my dull palate indistinguishable from the American sort—for only five cents a package.

The city is full of Americans, yet they say the season has

not yet really started. There is a convention of lady horticulturists, a convention of hotel managers, a gathering of serious-minded folk intent on a study of Latin America, and heaven knows how many others besides. Yet the city seems able to absorb any amount of tourist traffic without losing a particle of its individuality.

A friend who has lived long in Mexico scoffs at the notion that Mexico will soon be "ruined" by the great influx of tourists which is sure to come when the charm of the country becomes better known. "You don't know the Mexicans," he says. "True, they see the latest movies, attend the opera, drive the same cars we do, and commit approximately the same sins. But they remain Mexicans. And what the conquistadors couldn't do the Yankee will do no better."

What will happen, I hope, is that the tourist will go home a gentler-mannered person for having met the Mexicans, and a saner person for having experienced the slower tempo of Mexican life; and that the Mexican will increase the present rapid rate of his social and economic progress through his growing intimacy with the more energetic north.

Of one thing I am sure, and that is the advantage to all concerned which will come of good relations between the nations of this continent. The greatest door of American opportunity stands open to the south, and if I were a boy in school I should immediately start studying Spanish.

## *On Ball Bearings*

You will observe that one does not say, "Mexico City." One says, "Mexico, D. F." (The "D. F." stands for "Federal District.") That point cleared up, let us proceed to further rhapsodies on this most charming of capitals.

Years ago, when I was first beginning to dream of a visit to Mexico, a friend gave me a summary of his own experiences. Fortunately I kept it. With this, a phrase book, a map of the town and, above all, the universal helpfulness of the Mexicans, life rolls on ball bearings.

I must confess that I am thoroughly bewildered by the Mexicans. So far in my experience of them they are the most amiable folk I have encountered in my journeyings about this globe. Yet from what I read and hear they can be as ferocious as any species of the human family. Having said this, however, one has only said what can truthfully be said about any people. In all of us the animal is close to the surface. We shall do well to remember that even in the land of the free — occasionally called God's country — there have been civil war and insurrection, homicide and lynching, banditry and numerous other forms of behavior not considered civilized. And the United States is a veteran in the struggle for democracy.

I am obviously not competent to render any appraisal of the Mexican character, but I must insist on reporting that I have never seen a better behaved people. I spent Sunday rubbing elbows with them, and it was an experience that calls for adjectives!

Our first visit was to an exhibit of horsemanship, put on by

the Association of Charros — a group of substantial and blue-blooded citizens who array themselves in the colorful costume worn by the gentry of days gone by and, with their sons, dressed as replicas of themselves, fare forth to show the common folk what a gentleman ought to look like, and how a gentleman of Mexico can still ride a horse.

The arena being already jammed with respectful proletarians, we proceeded on to the castle of Chapultepec, a crag of breathtaking beauty where once lived those blundering Bourbons, Maximilian and his wife, Carlotta. Here, too, Montezuma could look down upon his Aztec empire and find it good, at a time when all to the north was wilderness.

We had a little trouble explaining to the taxi driver that we wished to tarry here. Nothing in our phrase books seemed to cover the situation, and in our panic we fell to babbling such obvious irrelevancies as "We are thirsty" and "Where can I find some oil for my lamp?" However, the taxi driver had met *gringos locos* before. He quickly settled matters by calling a soldier, who called a policeman, who called an interpreter, and all was well.

We stood on the historic balconies of the palace, disconcerted by the fact that while every prospect pleased man appeared not to be at all vile. Music floated from everywhere, mingling with the perfume of the mimosa. In the park below were brass bands and a symphony orchestra, and from near by came the soft melancholy of the marimba. Spread before us like something from the *Arabian Nights*, the monumental white buildings of the city sparkled in the hot sunshine. And beyond was the unreal loveliness of the mountain background.

Motorcars passed in an endless stream, directed by traffic officers in smartly tailored khaki and gleaming brass. Strolling on the paths or sitting relaxed on the stone benches were

people of every sort, from those in dark suits and derby hats to peons in sombrero and serape, with their solemn barefoot children.

There was no noise. Through the furnished apartments of the palace the people walked hat in hand, speaking in low tones, careful never to step off the strip of carpet provided for visitors. There were no guards in evidence. Here and there were signs: "Do Not Touch." Occasionally there was a sign: "You Are Supplicated Not to Touch."

Nobody touched. Nobody picked flowers. Nobody threw orange peel or scraps of paper on the lawns. I have never seen public decorum at a higher level.

One picture remains in my memory. Over the main stairway was a huge mural depicting scenes from the revolution, with figures carrying banners inscribed "Land and Liberty." Looking wistfully up at it, almost indistinguishable from the figures in the mural, was a peon family dressed literally in rags.

Here, outlined in flesh and pigment, was the Mexican dream. Rash the prophet who says it will not come true.

## *Beef en Brochette*

At last I have seen a bullfight! What with the numerous tourists in town, plus the fact that twenty-two year old "Armillita," the Dizzy Dean of bullfighting, was on the card, the show was a sellout. However, there are ticket scalpers here as everywhere; and for four dollars and seventeen cents each (twice the box-office price) we secured places on the fifth row of the sunny side.

It is a commentary on the steadiness of the climate here that tickets marked "Shady" cost nearly twice what those marked "Sunny" do. The demand for tickets is a puzzle. The cheapest places — on top of the roof — cost two and a half pesos. General admission on the sunny side costs three and a half pesos. In terms of purchasing power, that is at least three dollars. Yet all around me, in seats of seven pesos and more, were men and women who looked as if a square meal would have interested them more than a seat at a bullfight. I am told, however, that so ardent is the passion for this ancient sport that people will go hungry and pawn their clothes in order to buy a ticket.

Each to his taste. For myself, I found the proceedings rather on the dull side. Before the last of the six bulls had met his Maker and had been dragged — not in triumph but in honor — around the ring, I had had enough.

Bullfighting is a sport for connoisseurs. So refined is its technique and so rapid its action that the layman cannot hope to understand or appreciate what is going on. He cannot even tell whether the crowd is cheering the bull or the toreadors.

The waving of handkerchiefs, for example, is for the bull; and when hats, coats and other valuables are flung into the ring they are for the matador — though custom seems to require that they be flung back to their owners.

The brutality of bullfighting has been exaggerated. Its most unpleasant aspect has been eliminated by the Mexicans, and the messy spectacle of gored horses no longer affronts the sensitive. The horses wear heavily padded armor, and, instead of being killed by the dozen, now suffer no apparent damage.

The whole business is a ritual, elaborately formalized. The overture is a parade by the entire cast to the march from *Carmen*. Behind the principals comes a crew of redcoats with rakes, shovels and wheelbarrows, highly suggestive of the Ringling Brothers circus.

Then a gate opens and in charges a bull, almost visibly breathing flame from his nostrils. He is baited by a crew of capadores — agile fellows with red cloaks who jump behind prepared barriers or over the fence when the bull gets too close.

When the bull shows signs of tiring there is a blast of trumpets, indicating that the judges have ordered scene two. On come two well padded horses, with riders bearing spears. These are the picadors. Three times they prick the bull, meanwhile being well pushed around, and occasionally being knocked from their mounts. When this happens the cape-bearers create a diversion while the horseman is dragged to safety.

The picadors give place to the *banderilleros*, who dance in front of the bull until he charges, and then, by a miracle of deft timing, plant their beribboned darts in his shoulder. This also is done three times. When the bull is decorated like a chop *en brochette* he is ready for the matador — the

star who gets as much as five thousand dollars for a performance — and earns it. Few last beyond their twenties at this game, and many die horribly on the horns of an infuriated bull.

The matador begins by tossing his hat to some fair lady or prominent politican, or into the center of the ring, indicating his dedication to the crowd. Then, with his cloak, he proceeds to annoy the bull further. He uses a variety of passes, each with its name and literature. When a charge of the bull comes especially close the crowd roars with delight.

Finally, when the bull's head has lowered in fatigue to just the right point, the matador strikes a graceful attitude, poises his sword and, with a skill easier described than understood, plunges it into the bull's heart. Usually he misses on the first try and has to call for a second — even a third — sword. It is a home run with the bases full if he scores the first time up.

The bull dies instantly. The redcoats come in with a team of horses and drag off the carcass. The ring is swept and the performance is repeated. If the matador has done an especially good job he is showered with flowers, money and other evidences of approval, and is carried around the ring on the shoulders of his admirers. If he hasn't rung the bell he slinks off like a mere capador.

I must say that the crowd showed no greater excitement than can be seen at any American ball park during a close game. Certainly there was no bottle-throwing or threat to kill the umpire. I suspect that the patrons were no thirstier for blood than are Americans who pay their money to hear the anguish of a wrestling bout, or in the secret hope of seeing heads cracked at a hockey game.

## *Contradictions*

It is small comfort to me that others have tried to write about this contradictory land, and made themselves no less ridiculous than I sometimes suspect I am making myself. Try as one will to walk soberly in the middle of the road, being objective and truthful, there remain pitfalls of ignorance and emotion into which one inevitably falls.

I wax lyric, for example, about the gentle manners of the people, and a cynical Mexican reminds me that half of them have guns or knives concealed about their persons. I attend a bullfight and am impressed by the orderly behavior of the patrons. Yet I am obliged to note that there was a policeman at the gate frisking the customers for weapons.

I sit at my typewriter burbling about the charm of the streets, and in comes a friend to report that, while visiting one of the quaint native markets and being aware of nothing untoward save a slight jostling, he had been relieved of his watch, fountain pen and spectacles — each, it may be said, in a separate pocket. He was torn between dismay at his loss and admiration at the consummate skill with which the job had been done. I reported this episode to a widely traveled police official. He was regretful, but suggested that while Mexico may as yet have more than her share of pickpockets the species is not unknown in New York and Chicago. He immediately set the machinery of the police in motion. Meanwhile, he agreed that it might be a good idea to remind tourists coming here that they should be careful in crowds,

that they should carry only small amounts of money, and that the best place for jewelry and other valuables is the hotel safe.

One might with equal justice offer this warning to anyone visiting London or Paris. One might also add that in those cities—as in all others—one is occasionally short-changed by the natives, and that such people as taxi drivers have a way of gypping the sucker if they can. None of these things is peculiar to Mexico. Indeed, it has been my experience so far that this sort of petty swindling is rather less prevalent here than in certain other localities of my acquaintance.

Mexico has the disadvantage of being comparatively new to the tourist business. It is only a couple of years since visitors have been coming here in any great numbers. Yet the strides which have been made toward satisfactory entertainment of the foreigner are far more noteworthy than the occasional lapses encountered. Occasionally one hears a visitor complaining that things are not done as well as they are at home. Such people, of course, could be happy nowhere, and why they insist on traveling is a mystery I shall never fathom. The great majority, however, seem well pleased with what they find. And as long as the present stability of the government continues I am confident that the coming years will see things even better managed than they are now.

Today, for example, I had an interview with a high official of the government. After discussing weighty questions of state I brought up a matter I considered of great importance. This was the habit taxis and motorcycles had of racing down the streets with cutouts open at three in the morning.

The high altitude of the city, I said, made it difficult enough for the foreigner to sleep—especially the first few nights. I suggested that international relations would be

improved if the traffic could be made to pipe down a trifle. He agreed heartily, though he added, smiling, that from what he had heard a little piping down of traffic might go well even in American cities. All Americans will concede this point, but the Mexicans will do something about it. They don't want the tourist to be annoyed, however slightly. The odds are even that before long it will be a serious offense to make undue noise in the vicinity of hotels where Americans sleep.

While the Mexicans work night and day putting up hotels, building filling stations and cutting red tape in an effort to encourage visiting and — no less important — to improve social relations with their great neighbor to the north, Americans might pause to reflect that Mexico is not "foreign" — *they are.*

## *Beads for the Natives*

I am not sure that Mexico is any more difficult to understand than is any other land, but it is difficult enough. I am almost as ignorant of Mexico, historic and contemporary, as was the American woman whose baggage was opened at the border and found to contain glass beads, whistles and bits of brightly colored calico. Asked what she purposed doing with this merchandise; she replied, "Why, I'm going to trade with the natives."

I am perhaps a step beyond that, but only a step. However, as a journalist I must maintain a front of reasonable intelligence. I must, at least, be able to ask questions. And so, hat in hand, I proceed to the newly created information department of the government and go through the silly ritual that I have gone through in so many of the world's capitals.

Mexico, D. F., is exactly like Washington, D. C., in this respect. You stand in an anteroom. You wait endlessly. You are ushered into the office of an undersecretary who, after an exchange of amenities, ushers you into the office of a secretary. You ask questions the answers to which you know perfectly well. The secretary, knowing perfectly well that what he says will be discounted up to a hundred per cent, solemnly answers your questions and gives you reams of mimeographed balderdash which he is well aware you will never read. You shake hands, bow, and proceed on your weary way of trying to extract an occasional grain of truth from the chaff of official propaganda.

I am interested in the stability of the present Mexican gov-

ernment. Is the government socialistic or communistic, or merely another administration bent on lining its pockets while it has the chance? I am interested in the present status of the Catholic Church. Has the church been unjustly treated? Have the Mexicans turned infidel? Or is what goes on merely the normal progress toward separation of church and state that other nations have made? I am interested in the future that American capital and American business may expect to face in Mexico. Does "Mexico for the Mexicans" mean isolation or does it mean a greater opportunity for American enterprise than ever existed before?

It is not easy to get answers to these questions. Mexico, like all countries, is divided. I talk to one man about the present government and his eyes flash with the same fire that one saw in Republican eyes before the election of Roosevelt. Being careful to check what I say against the fact that I have chatted with only a handful of people in a single city, you may mark it down that big business, landowners, clericals, the middle class generally, and perhaps the higher officers of the army, are hostile to the Cárdenas administration. Their hostility is due not so much to the motives of the administration as to its methods. They appear to think that Cárdenas is an idealist, an impractical dreamer and the tool of unscrupulous radicals.

On the other side, considerably divided, are the people — the Indians, the peasants and the working classes. Even labor is divided, as in the United States, between craft unionism and the less conservative spirit of syndicalism.

It perhaps simplifies matters too much, but I should say that Mexican opinion divides along almost the same lines that American opinion does. There are several differences, however. One is that the two-party system has not yet become

an actuality in Mexico. Another is that Mexican opinion tends to take more violent form than does American opinion. A third is the church problem. In the latter connection it is well to remember that, while the church has been dispossessed of its lands, the dispossessing was not done by the present government. It was, in fact, done in 1857.

It was refreshing, after days of weary effort to sift the false from the true, to sit in the cool, lofty-ceilinged study of our ambassador to Mexico and swap yarns as one newspaperman with another.

If it is the function of an ambassador to maintain good will between governments, the incumbent of our Mexican embassy is notably successful. From what I have heard, Mr. Daniels appears to be no exponent of dollar diplomacy. And I suspect that economic royalists are not now as much at home in the embassy here as I have heard tell that they were in days gone by.

## *Shadow Around the Bend*

It being my trade to comment on the noteworthy—or what seems to me to be so—I wish to make mention of Señor Leon Luzo. He is a maître d'hôtel in Paolo's restaurant, and the first waiter I ever met who, when asked about a dish, did not instantly reply, "Oh, very nice." His answer is different. He shrugs his shoulders and says: "I do not know. How can I when I do not know your taste?" Incidentally, if you ever come this way, drop in at Paolo's and ask for chicken Parmesan. For dessert have zabaglione. Your bill—unless prices have risen since last night—will be seventy-seven cents.

The rate of exchange makes Mexico a bargain for the traveler with a slender purse. But let me warn anyone who is tempted to come here to secure hotel reservations in advance. The principle industry in Mexico just now seems to be hotel building. New hotels spring up overnight. But tourists spring up faster.

This afternoon, under the tutelage of an archaeologist of the department of education, I visited the pyramids built by the Toltecs somewhere about the third century A.D. Near by are the ruins of a city—or of a succession of cities, built on top of one another—which must have housed at least a million people. What made these people disappear no one knows. It may have been volcanoes, drought or disease. One guess is as good as another. All we know is that these people attained a high degree of what we call civilization and that

they built on a scale so vast as to awe even those of us who are used to skyscrapers.

One has melancholy thoughts as he stands amid these empty ruins and gazes up at pyramids larger even than those of Egypt. If there is any moral to be drawn from them it is that when men become too intelligent they are conquered by men who know nothing except how to fight.

The Toltec, who knew mathematics and practiced the peaceful arts, was conquered by the Aztec, who knew how to wield a sword and was no slave to comfort. In turn, the Aztec bowed to the gunpowder and the still greater toughness of the Spaniard.

From the pyramids, drowsing in the eternal sun, it was an easy step to what were once the floating gardens of Montezuma and are now the canals on which are floated the fruits and vegetables of Mexico City. Here repair the natives for their Sunday afternoon diversion. In gaily decorated boats they float along, with singers and marimba players drifting beside them.

It was pleasant to recline comfortably, hearing nothing but the nostalgic music of the Mexicans and the soft whisper of the water against the paddle of the boatman. Here one forgets the clamor of the city — and Mexico, D. F., is a peculiarly noisy city.

These ancient canals seem to murmur with the fatalistic calm of the Indian. They have seen all manner of cataclysm — flood, drought, earthquakes, pestilence, volcanoes and the ravages of war. They have seen one race of man come after another, killing and burning. Yet still, they seem to whisper, life drifts on. Take the sunshine when you have it, say these dark waters. There is shadow just around the bend.

Back from the pyramids and the gardens of the ancient

emperors, and to a brightly lighted hall for an exhibition of pelota—a game, it is said, which was much favored by the hardy Aztecs. Certainly, if they favored it, they were a hardy lot. Never have I seen a sport which calls for such speed, skill and stamina.

It is played in a court which I should guess is two hundred feet long. The players—usually four in number—wear curiously curved baskets strapped to their right hands. With these baskets they catch and hurl the ball in a confusing variety of angles against the walls of the court. The ball must be thrown as soon as it is caught. And rests are few and fleeting. At the end of nearly two hours of steady play the contestants were just barely able to get off the court on their own steam.

All during the play there was a constant shouting by men scattered through the audience. These men wore red berets, and were, I found out, betting commissioners. The system of betting was carefully explained to me but it still remains a mystery. All I know is that the betting is heavy and that it goes on until far into the night. Like everything else in Mexico, I see only the surface. And there is so much more than meets the eye.

## *The Seamy Side*

I have said — and felt — so many pleasant things about this land that it might be well to give a look at the seamy side.

First off, there is the prevalence of beggary. Despite the fact that Mexico seems not to have suffered from the depression as most other countries have, and the fact that today it has relatively much less unemployment than prevails in its neighbor to the north, the streets of its capital are infested with beggars.

They are not importunate. They do not follow you. Their voices are soft as they beg for alms. They rarely seek to make capital of deformities. As beggars go, they are the least objectionable I have ever seen. But they tug at the heart-strings — especially the women and children.

The government is well aware that tourists dislike being reminded of such things as hunger and poverty and disease. As fast as possible beggary will be abolished — at least where the traveler can see it.

The second unpleasant fact which must be recorded is the prevalence of thievery. The visitor will be well advised to carry as few valuables as possible and to be on the alert in crowds. He will be well advised, too, to keep tight hold of such things as cameras and handbags. I am told by those who have lived here long enough to know that one should never leave anything in a parked car.

In short, the visitor must remember that Mexico is in a state of transition between a primitive society, with small regard for property rights, and the society of higher development in

which, if there is not greater regard for property rights, there is more protection for them.

The Mexican government is keenly alive to the situation and is doing all it can to combat it. For one thing, the city of Mexico is now adding a thousand men to its police force.

I do not know how much banditry there is; but I suspect that there is less than the scaremongers would have you believe. None the less, the main highways are regularly patrolled, and on the road to Cuernavaca, for example, almost every hilltop has a military observation station.

It must be understood that Mexico consists of a highly civilized nucleus surrounded by an outer husk of the primitive. There is a deep gulf between the inhabitant of Mexico, D. F., and the natives of remote and sometimes actively hostile Indian villages.

The problems of Mexican life are not, obviously, to be disposed of in a paragraph or two. The traveler must remember that while in some parts of Mexico he will be as safe as he would be at home, in other parts he had better stop, look and listen.

The same thing can be said of the roads. The road from the capital to Cuernavaca is as well engineered and paved as anything in the United States. So is the road from Cuernavaca to Taxco. But the road from Mexico City to Teotihuacán, where the pyramids are, and which passes the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe — perhaps the most hallowed spot in all Mexico — is a very bad road indeed. When a Mexican road is good it is as good as any road in the world. But when it is bad it makes a proving ground seem like a boulevard!

If you have no great zest for adventure you will probably be happier if you stay on the main roads. In a year or two

the picture will change enormously — as it has changed in the last two years. But at this writing the motorcar finds limited scope for its usefulness.

And that seems to exhaust all the unpleasant things I can think of to say about Mexico. As fast as I encounter new ones I shall report them. Until then I must say again that Mexico is a beautiful land, peopled by the pleasantest-mannered, most hospitable and generally agreeable human beings I have encountered on this planet. The Mexican character, like all others, undoubtedly has its unpleasant aspects, but thus far I have been spared sight of them. Perhaps if I knew the Mexicans better I should not like them so well. Meanwhile, I am content to take them for what they appear to be — the most gracious hosts of my experience.

## *Greener Fields*

We are carefully taught that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, but it is a lesson that few of us ever learn.

Consider, for example, my efforts to arrange an interview with Leon Trotzky. I began with local journalists, who assured me that it was quite impossible. So, stubbornly, I moved on to police headquarters. There I submitted to an examination, gave the Christian names of my grandparents, and had my height, weight and girth, the color of my eyes, and distinguishing marks, if any, recorded. I was then advised to return to my hotel and await developments.

There was a little time left over after doing these things, and this time I devoted to the embassy, influential private citizens and various officials of state. Diligently I pulled wires in every direction and, although not encouraged, did not altogether lose hope of ultimate success.

Meanwhile, a Chicago businessman had also got the idea of having a talk with Trotzky. He had not been trained in the technique of interviewing celebrities, but he had learned that lesson about the shortest distance between two points. So he merely went to the headquarters of the local Rotary Club and expressed a desire to meet Mr. Trotzky.

Was he laughed at? Was he told it would be impossible? I regret to say that he was not. In five minutes he was on his way and spent the rest of the afternoon with the uncle of the Russian revolution.

Was my face red when I heard about it! And is it still red! I haven't yet succeeded in interviewing Trotzky.

Ah, well — so many things have gone otherwise than as planned. Among them is the automobile which was shipped weeks ago and has not yet arrived. It is reported as having left Laredo and moving south, but the boom in Mexican business has created a shortage of freight cars, and so my jalopy moves toward me at about the speed of the polar ice-cap.

I can wait no longer. We have hotel accommodations reserved in Taxco and Acapulco — and I have had it clearly demonstrated that in this country a hotel room is not lightly to be given up. We could take train to Cuernavaca, some forty miles away, but this would consume at least ten hours. As for Acapulco, we could fly, or motor. There is no railroad. So, joining with friends, we hire a car and driver.

As a matter of fact, we have not missed our own car at all. Taxis are cheap in Mexico City. You can go nearly anywhere for fourteen cents — no tip expected. Or you can hire a car for only fifty-six cents an hour.

Though I must hasten to say that driving behind a Mexican tends to harden the arteries. The native has to pass a most rigorous examination before he can get a license, and he drives extremely well. But his attitude toward an automobile is that of his vaquero forebears toward a mustang. He likes to go fast and to stop with the wheels in the air. A curve is a challenge, and a narrow street, crowded with small children, is an opportunity for a display of dexterity.

Not least among the difficulties of motoring in Mexico is the word for slow. It is *despacio* — precisely the opposite of what it should be. When you want to say, "Drive slowly," you say, "Drive with dispatch." It is very confusing.

I do not know what the word for fast is. I have had no occasion to use it!

There is a widely credited legend that this is a land of easy-going indolence where time means nothing and the inhabitants sit around all day playing guitars. Nothing could be further from the truth. Life in Mexico, D. F., goes at a brisk clip. Appointments are kept. Our driver said he would be at our door at ten thirty, and at ten thirty there he was. *Mañana* may be the watchword of the rural regions, but here in the metropolis things move as rapidly and efficiently as they do in any American city of my acquaintance. There is not, however, the crowding that obtains in New York and Chicago, except in certain markets, where vendors use the streetcar right of way for display tables.

Our driver took us through these quarters at forty miles per hour, but without a casualty. When we reached the open country his foot went down on the throttle in earnest. Timidly, I said, "*Despacio.*" He merely gave me an indulgent smile and the carburetor more gas. So I commended my soul to the Virgin of Guadalupe and tried to enjoy what I could see of the landscape.

## *Confused and Confusing*

The Mexican government is at present in a quandary about amateur photographers. It does not want the tourist to go around snapping pictures of beggars and thatched huts and crumbling ruins. It wants him to take wireless towers and office buildings and beautiful scenery. It has even made the mistake of establishing regulations as to what may or may not be photographed, and while some of these regulations have been rescinded there is still plenty of confusion about the matter.

Mexico in transition is confused and confusing. A sample of this puzzling state of affairs was the glass factory I visited the other day.

Its proprietor was not happy. The volume of his business had increased so rapidly, he said, that it had become impossible for him to do the really artistic work for which he had been trained and which he loved to do. Uncertainly, he balances between handwork and quantity production. He is neither wholly ancient nor wholly modern. His shop is equipped with oil-burning furnaces and a few pieces of crude machinery. Most of his work is still being done as it was done by his ancestors, but the individual is no longer self-sufficient. Into his establishment has crept the division of effort which marks the modern factory system.

He no longer works alone. He has a number of men and small boys on his pay roll. He is, in short, caught up in the quantity-production process, and fundamentally the only distinction between his ill-lighted, awkwardly arranged, crudely

equipped shop and a Toledo glass plant is that his is not as far advanced. The principle in both is exactly the same.

He is melancholy at the distance he has drifted from hand craftsmanship, but there is nothing that he or anyone else can do about it. Sentimentalists wax mournful over the decay of artistry which (they say) must inevitably follow the introduction of machinery. But from what I can learn the modern Mexican does not share their sorrow. He is realistic, and it is his belief that too much craftsmanship is the result of methods which are clumsy if not dangerous and needlessly tiresome. It is his opinion that art can survive and even profit by scientific method and those magnifications of the senses which we call tools. He sees no reason why the artist should be limited to muscle power when electric motors are available.

Modern Mexico is not satisfied with being quaint and picturesque. It is eager for the new — not the new as we have offered it, but the new as forward-looking Mexican minds conceive it. To this aspiring Mexico the newness of the United States is already old. It looks to something beyond anything we have produced.

Above all things the new Mexico craves education. No village is too mean, nowadays, to be without its school. Incidentally, English is a required subject in the secondary schools. In ten years many Mexicans will speak English. Today surprisingly few do. If you are coming down here by all means bring along a pocket dictionary.

Mexico values its art, its scenery, its colorful costumes and the rich historicity of its buildings. But it is not content to remain a museum. It is reaching out for sanitation, communication, transport and quantity production. Casting off the peonage, spiritual no less than economic, in which at least 80 per cent of its population has always lived, it is plunging

ahead on a course of radical democracy which will lead it to glory—or maybe to disaster. (The answer depends on whom you ask about it!)

Incidentally, I am told that a movie in which the hero was a Mexican peasant and all the villains were Americans did more to make the Mexicans feel friendly toward the United States than all the ambassadors and felicitous sentiments that have crossed the Rio Grande.

Score one for much abused Hollywood!

## *Making Night Hideous*

Everybody said, "Oh, you *must* see Taxco!" And for once everybody was right.

Taxco proves to be a number of places in one. First, it is probably the oldest mining community on the continent, and from its silver mines wealth still flows. Second, it is a mecca for artists—real ones and also the sort which infest Greenwich Village, the Rive Gauche in Paris, and Taos, New Mexico. These folks wear berets, speak a sort of Spanish, and have violent love affairs with one another. Between times they paint or sculpt or make pottery.

The third aspect of Taxco is its most remarkable. This ancient town, perched picturesquely on a mountaintop, is being kept by the Mexican government as a sort of open-air museum. Practically all the traffic is on rubber-tired wheels, but the streets remain paved with cobbles and the houses, almost meeting over the narrow streets, are as they have always been.

No misguided householder is allowed to modernize his property or even to make changes without permission of the authorities. Beggary is suppressed, and no vendors of post-cards are allowed to make hideous the ancient, laurel-shaded square.

It is the Carcassonne of Mexico, and no one has been able to exaggerate its beauty.

After we had climbed and climbed, waxing ecstatic at the landscape bathed in the rose and gold of the setting sun, and had reached the Taxquenia hotel, we cried with one voice, "Here, at last, is peace!"

And truly I have never experienced such a sense of tranquillity as when I sat in the garden quaffing the golden brew of Orizaba and gazing off at the slowly purpling hills. And never have I encountered a ruder disillusionment!

We had decided that the city of Mexico had raised noise-making to the plane of a fine art. We were sure that no other place could match its ability to keep a person awake at night. But we had not tried to sleep in Taxco.

No sooner had our heads touched pillow than the cacophonous symphony began. It started with the barking of dogs — two or three of them, faint and faraway, like the French horn in a Wagnerian opera. More dogs took up the theme — hundreds . . . thousands of them. They barked and howled and made sounds for which there is no word, and in every tonal scale, including the Chinese.

Other sounds swelled the tornado of discord. Bands — marimba, brass and indefinable — contributed their portion. The guitar, hitherto unheard in Mexico, broke into full cry. Singers — male, female and inhuman — poured oil on the conflagration of noise. There were what sounded like fights to the death between lions, tigers, leopards and elephants. In this magnificent din the squawking of motor horns was hardly audible.

At this point I think I slept. It seems hardly possible, but I did. The sleep, however, did not last long. The life with which Taxco vibrates is content with little repose. Long before dawn the racket recommenced. And to the extraordinary, the incomparable variety of sound that had marked the night was added the ringing of church bells. There must be a hundred churches in Taxco, each with a thousand bells — and all of them cracked. And the bell ringers of Taxco are not content with the usual method

of bell ringing. They do not leave the business to gravity. There is nothing negative about their bell ringing. It is the most definitely positive thing I ever experienced. The comment of my consort was to the point: "What must it have been like in Mexico before the church was dispossessed!"

All things end — even a night in Taxco. And an excellent breakfast in the sunny patio of the Taxquenia completely obliterated all memory of the assault upon our ears. And before we had been long on the hot and dusty road to Acapulco we were wishing we were back in Taxco, forgetful of its noisy nights.

It is only a hundred and eighty-six miles to Acapulco, and the road is fairly well paved. But it is a road consisting almost exclusively of sharp curves, and although our chauffeur did his best to heed our entreaties for a little more *despacio*, our hearts were not far from the larynx most of the way.

The scenery is monotonously beautiful, towns few and dust-covered. As we drew nearer the Pacific it became hotter and moister. When, at last, we caught a glimpse of it through the sage-green hills we cried like the soldiers of Xenophon, "The sea! The sea!" and were very glad.

It is a long journey — eight hours, with a decent amount of *despacio*. But when you stand, as we did, on the balcony of our cabaña in the Mirador, perched high on the rocks over the foaming sea, I think you will say, as we did, that it was well worth it.

## *Speaking of Money*

Acapulco, one might venture to prophesy, offers unrivaled opportunities for real-estate speculation. It has a deep, land-locked harbor, comparable, say those who have seen both, only to that of Rio de Janeiro, and there are two marvelous beaches, one for morning, the other for afternoon. Also, there is fishing that ranges from the tasty little creatures that can be caught off the dock without bait to that elusive battler of the deep, the sailfish.

Inland is a paradise for the huntsman, with a wealth of flying prey, and deer and wildcat for those who seek bigger game. For the eye that is content to see and do nothing about it, there is a beauty of scene equaled only by the Côte d'Azur of France.

In a year or two, I suspect, the drive to Hornos beach will be called "Ocean boulevard." It will be lined with luxurious villas, tennis courts and private swimming pools. Not far away will be golf courses and polo fields; and multicylindered cars, driven by uniformed chauffeurs, will line the streets.

Only two things stand in the way: (1) Transportation; (2) climate.

By airplane Acapulco is reached from Mexico, D. F., in less than two hours. By motorcar it takes the better part of two days. There is no railroad.

The climate is rather on the warm side, though a virtually steady breeze tempers it. What nothing seems to temper is the humidity. This, however, may be more noticeable to the transient than to those who stay long enough to become accustomed to it.

At the present rate of exchange Acapulco is a bargain in winter resorts. You can live at El Mirador, the town's best hostelry, with a private room and bath on the cliff edge, with excellent meals served in an open-air dining room, for three dollars and a half a day. Taxis take you anywhere for twenty-eight cents. Motor-driven fishing boats, with bait thrown in, cost about one dollar an hour.

Life in Mexico is very cheap for the American. Even in the capital, first-class hotel accommodations can be had for two and a half dollars a day, and the Ritz serves a table d'hôte of extraordinary proportions and quality for seventy cents.

The difference in exchange is a blessing for Americans—not so good for Mexicans. Prices are rising faster than incomes. It is the purpose of the present government to make Mexico self-sustaining, and it insists that the peso will now buy in Mexico about what the dollar buys in the United States. This is only partly true. Even when prices correspond the quality is likely to be inferior. A box of matches, for example, costs five centavos—a cent and a quarter. But they are not as good matches as are given away in the United States. Gasoline costs nineteen centavos the liter (eight, gas; eleven, tax). This figures out to twenty-one cents a gallon—about what we pay at home. To a Mexican, however, the sum amounts to about half the daily wage of a laborer.

The money question thus becomes one of the major bones of contention in Mexican politics. And it is a question that is just as hard to understand in Spanish as it is in English. The average tourist is content with the fact that life in Mexico is pleasant and cheap, and leaves it to the native to figure out whether the steadily rising tide of tourist traffic is worth the increased cost of living that it causes.

Whether the tourist is a blessing or a curse is a debatable

subject with Mexicans. He brings money — no doubt of that. But he brings disturbing ideas, too — especially when he tosses pesos around as if they were small change. And some tourists are — to use plain language — swine. There was one I saw yesterday — a loud-mouthed lout who stretched himself on a pile of serapes in a shop and made wisecracks about the people whose guest he was.

It will be interesting to see whether the gentle courtesy of the Mexicans is destroyed by the churlish swagger of such visitors, or whether the tourist takes home with him, among his loot of shells, hammered silver and basketry, a new conception of politeness.

The Mexican may be as lazy, treacherous, inefficient and cruel as his detractors say he is. But I will shatter lances with anyone who says he is not amiable and agreeable to live with. Months here might change that opinion — old-timers say with vehemence that it would. I am content with my experience of weeks. I insist, also with vehemence, that Mexicans are nice people. Especially the children. I could write pages and not do justice to the little folk of this land. I think they are its outstanding feature.

## *From Printer to President*

Learning that the president of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas (accent on the first syllable, please) was in this embryo Monte Carlo on a combined rest and inspection trip, I resolved to favor him with a call.

So I wrote his chief of staff, asking for an appointment. I handed my note to a porter at the rusty old gate of the wireless station, where the president was staying, and hoped for the best.

In an hour there was a soldier at my hotel with word that *el presidente* would see me at noon the following day.

I presented myself at the time appointed and was met by the president's adjutant. I was taken to a chair under a grove of trees, beside the water's edge, where the adjutant, in excellent English, inquired what I wished to see *el presidente* about. I replied that I merely wanted to learn from *el presidente's* own lips what he was trying to do.

We moved then to a table some fifty feet away, where a man was seated, busy with a litter of papers. He rose at our approach, a stocky figure in well worn army shirt and a pair of ancient khaki trousers now almost white. This was the president of Mexico, once a printer by trade, long a soldier, and now the hope of the masses — “a guy,” said one of them, “that Mexico has been hungry for — a straight guy.”

His face, dark brown in hue, was impassive as he held out his hand. He has, I suspect, more than a trace of Indian ancestry, and the gravity of his manner is that of the Indian.

But it was soon evident that this serious man has a sense of humor, and the lips under the thick, close-cropped black mustache often twitched in whimsical smiles.

Forty years old, he gives the impression of being an idealist of the rare sort that is capable of energetic action. While he talks readily, he does not insist upon doing all the talking. He is assured yet modest. When I said that we were members of the same craft, he answered with that deprecating little smile of his that he had been only a hand typesetter — accompanying the words with illustrative gestures.

I succumbed completely to the charm of this man when in answer to my question — what would he like my American readers to know about Mexico — he replied that he would prefer to have me report what I saw and heard myself. Our conversation was all as informal as that. It lasted an hour or more, and would have lasted longer if I had not had the belated decency to terminate it myself.

He asked as many questions as I did. He was especially curious to know why there was so much poverty and discontent in the United States when we had had so much time to achieve liberty. I couldn't answer that, so I asked him about the future of American capital in Mexico. His reply was that there was a great future in Mexico for the foreign investor if he would be content to abide by Mexican law and not be too greedy. The one thing Mexico would no longer tolerate, he said, was exploitation of the masses.

That led me to ask about communism. There were a few communists in Mexico, he said, but their influence was small. Mexico was experimenting with ideas which might be called socialistic, but in essence its political philosophy did not differ materially from the American.

"And what about Trotzky?" I inquired.

"A tired old man," was the answer, "to whom Mexico has given refuge. His stay here has no political significance whatever."

Did Mexico want tourists, I asked. Indeed it did, he said, adding earnestly that it wanted them not so much for the economic advantage as for the cultural gifts they brought. That led to talk of education — the subject obviously closest to his heart. The present federal budget for education, he said, is sixty times what it was in 1910.

"Is compulsory education new with you?" I asked.

The answer was accompanied by a flashing smile. "Oh, no — education was always compulsory — only there were no schools! Now there is — or will be — a school in every village."

We talked a little then about the curiously vexing question of photography. Mexico, he said, did not want people snapping pictures of disease and poverty. I asked him if he had ever heard about our noble experiment in prohibition, and I suggested that the best answer Mexico could make to people who photographed the wrong things would be to send a battalion of photographers to the United States.

"Surely," he said, with the suggestion of a lisp there is in his soft voice, "you have no such poverty in the United States as we have in Mexico?"

I could only shrug my shoulders and suggest that sometime he visit the United States.

## *Church and State*

Here are some remembered fragments of the conversation I had with the president of Mexico, Señor Cárdenas, as we sat under the trees in the wireless station of Acapulco, with the mountains and the blue water of the harbor and a British warship shimmering in the sun for background.

As I said, there was nothing cut and dried about our talk. It flitted easily from one topic to another, and if there are errors in my report of it they must be ascribed to the fact that the conversation was managed through an interpreter. Señor Cárdenas has about the same command of English that I have of Spanish.

We discussed the expropriation of wealth, about which so much has been said and written. He said, if I understood correctly, that while the law permitted expropriation, the right had been seldom exercised. The only actual expropriation of lands had been for the use of the state — for sanitary and similar purposes. That is, there had been condemnation proceedings, such as were a commonplace in the United States. As for the breaking up of great estates and the giving of land to the small farmer, this had not been expropriation at all. The owners of the great estates had learned what our southern planters were beginning to learn before our civil war — that slave labor really does not pay. These great estates had simply not made money. They had not paid their taxes. Their lands had therefore reverted to the state, exactly as they would in the U. S. A.

That is my impression of what he said. It is a complicated subject at best, and it will probably be some time before I get below the surface of it.

Even more complicated and difficult to understand is the church problem. We discussed that problem at considerable length.

Mexico, said the president, sought to exercise no control over religion. The state made no effort to interfere with the observance of faith. All it objected to was interference of the church with government.

"You must have seen for yourself," he said, "that the practice of religion is unhampered. There are church services everywhere, and feast days are celebrated in the ancient manner. But priests are not allowed to make political propaganda, and religious instruction is not permitted in the public schools. Mexico has been and remains predominantly Roman Catholic. It is not to be denied, however, that for an increasing number of Mexicans there is a new religion. It is the religion of work and mutual service."

"That is your side of it," I said. "I shall now hunt up some ecclesiastic who will give me the other side of the picture."

"I hope you will," said Cárdenas simply. "Every question has at least two sides. But in this case I am confident that you will find our side to be the right one."

I reserve my verdict on this controversy. Its many contradictions are not to be resolved by a few days of superficial investigation. Like so many questions, its complexities are by no means confined to Mexico. They are world-wide. Only here are they made so visible. Here there are no religious orders. Clerical garb is not permitted on the streets. The

church cannot own property. The number of priests that a community may have is limited. Priests may not officiate outside their own parishes. Many and varied are the regulations. Yet in the many churches, so Spanish outside and so Mexican inside, the people seem to worship as they always did, and on feast days the children, dressed in white, carry candles as they march in the streets just as if this struggle of church and state had never been.

It is enormously difficult to reach any dependable conclusions about it all. But from what I have seen and heard the church has definitely been shorn of its temporal power and there is small likelihood that it will ever regain that power.

As for the Mexicans who are deserting orthodox religious faith for this new religion of "work and mutual service," one enters the danger ground of prophecy when he attempts to discuss them. I asked such a Mexican if it were possible for any nation to endure without a belief in God.

"What is 'God'?" he answered. "And does it matter how we define the word if the life we lead is good?"

In Mexico every yea has its nay, and nothing is as it seems. Rash is the visitor who comes too easily to conclusions. Cárdenas himself typifies these contradictions. A revolutionist all his life, he neither smokes nor drinks and frankly laments the impracticability of prohibiting liquor and gambling.

Well, there were people waiting — common people, for he sees everybody — so I rose to go. I left with the feeling that there is no stuffing to the shirt of the man who is now boss of Mexico. He has charm, modesty, determination, and his dark eyes smolder with faith in his dream of a new Mexico.

Whatever the outcome, this new Mexico is an experiment

that is enormously interesting. If it continues to advance as it has advanced in the last two or three years it will take its place in the front rank of civilization. If it does not . . . many prophets will have been proved right.

## *A Great Experiment*

It was the opinion of President Cárdenas, expressed with some vehemence, that the banditry of Mexico had been overadvertised. Banditry, he said, was disappearing. It was disappearing not so much because of more determined repression as because of the increasing prosperity of the people.

Another Mexican with whom I talked agreed that banditry was disappearing, but gave another reason for it. It was the tourist, he said, who was making Mexico safer. Banditry was bad for the tourist business. Hence the country was refusing to tolerate banditry.

This same man spoke frankly about what was really going on in Mexico. He is — or was — a man of enormous wealth. In the old days his income was sometimes a million dollars a year. He is a man of culture, has traveled widely and speaks several languages fluently. He is a man of the world, as highly civilized an individual as one may encounter.

“Still, I am a half-breed,” he says. “I do not look it or act it, but I am. Few Mexicans of the upper class will admit this, but if they come of families that have been in Mexico a hundred years or more they are half-breeds, too.

“The half-breed seems to acquire all the worst qualities of his mixed ancestry. He loses both the nobility of the Indian, who is essentially a man of culture and wisdom, and the solidity of the white race. He is alert but deceitful, resourceful but dishonest, suave but treacherous.

“On the other hand — we observe that the mongrel dog can be taught the most tricks. Here in Mexico we are

attempting the great experiment of making a civilized nation out of a pack of mongrels. It remains to be seen if we can do it. And we shall not know the answer for at least a hundred years."

Here, I think, is a laboratory of social experiment strangely like the Russian, in which one may witness the birth pangs of a new civilization. One wavers between awe and exasperation. If one listens too much to the theorists one becomes starry eyed himself. If one listens too much to Americans domiciled here he will grow unduly pessimistic. One hears so many tales of shiftlessness and deceit, of graft and incompetence, of gravely courteous Indians turned by the acquisition of a few words of English into creatures surly and impudent.

That, however, is what one hears in every land where the docile farmer becomes a city dweller, losing the honest simplicity of the countryside before he acquires the real merits of urban life. Mexico is in a state of transition, with the Middle Ages and antiquity struggling to keep step with today. It is typified by the sight I saw this afternoon — an Indian, almost the color of charcoal, a straw sombrero jammed down on his flowing hair, his serape flying in the wind, bounding along an unpaved road on a motorcycle!

The native dislikes the tourist, or, rather, is bewildered by him, and vice versa. The reason is that the tourist is interested only in hammered silver, sixteenth century altar pieces and the crumbling ruins of old haciendas, while the native is interested only in motorcycles, radio, the movies and all the long list of gadgets which constitute "civilization" and which have become so burdensome that the tourist struggles expensively to get away from them.

What to the native constitutes an improvement, "spoils" or "ruins" a place for the tourist. The tourist is delighted

with burros and cobblestone pavement; the native wants motorcars and macadam. The tourist knows all about Maximilian and never heard of Cárdenas. What he sees as beautiful and snaps with his camera the Mexican is ashamed of.

The tourist's interest is in a life which has vanished, never to return, while the native's interest is in a life yet to be. The one lives in yesterday, the other in tomorrow. They cannot possibly understand each other.

Speaking of tourists, let me hasten to give a piece of advice — good, if not likely to be followed. Carry a large Mazda bulb with you if you like to read at night. It is a peculiarity of hotelkeepers the world over to provide a minimum of light in their rooms, but the Mexican hotels break all records. In a land where most of the people retire when night falls, one small and dusty bulb high against the ceiling is considered almost violent illumination. Though an even better plan than bringing light with you is to do as the natives do — go to bed early and rise with the dawn. The reason is that the noisiest part of the night is from five A.M. to eight A.M. That is when the church bells ring, and it is a stout sleeper that can resist their clamor. Mexico's best time for sleeping is the middle of the day.

## *Fiesta or Carnival?*

The fiesta — part religion, part fun — fades from the Mexican scene, and carnival — scientific merrymaking promoted and publicized by the state and financed by the businessmen — is supposed to take its place.

If what I saw last night in Chilpancingo is a fair sample the change is not for the better.

The village square was jammed with merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels and flying turns. No señoritas in black mantillas with roses in their hair sat strumming their guitars, but from loud-speakers blared the voice of a Mexican crooner.

Bombs went off in the distance and the sky reddened with an occasional rocket. Here and there a firecracker popped. Gangs of boys, hooded and robed, paraded solemnly around the square, bearing sugar-cane torches. Barefooted Indians wrapped in their serapes stood impassively watching the catchpenny shows. Others shuffled endlessly to and fro, their women carrying their babies, while small children walked beside them carrying still smaller children.

There was nothing exciting about it — no noise, no rowdiness, and, at a guess, not much fun. The people rode the flying horses, tossed rings at sticks, bought trinkets from the stalls lighted with gasoline flares, or sat silently on the benches, seeming to wonder what it was all about.

Here, I thought, was the religious question brought into sharp focus. Here church and state were subject to comparisons, and I am sure that in the minds of the people the state came off a poor second.

The Mexican, be he pure Indian or mestizo, is a serious if not melancholy person, and religious ceremonial is to him what sport is to the Anglo-Saxon. And when the church put on a ceremonial it did it with a pomp and circumstance, an order and dignity, to which the Mexican soul was—and still is, I think—attuned.

Whatever may be said of the fiesta on rational grounds, as showmanship it was superb. It had a rich background of tradition, it had meaning in itself, the gorgeous costumes were hallowed by antiquity. By contrast the carnival—half commercial, half political—is cheap, vulgar, tawdry and tiresome. I may jump too quickly to conclusions, but I am convinced that it is not in the Mexican to make whoopee. Our feverish ways of amusing ourselves are to him dull and childish. He has neither our vigorous contumacity nor the gay abandon of the Latin. He lives in a world we know not of, and he has, as yet, small taste for ours.

As we sat on a bench, pondering these things, a small and ragged boy sat down beside us. He was rubbing his arm, and he explained, with gestures, that he had been lassoed and hurt a little. But, he said, with a ravishing smile, *es nada*. What was a little pain to a fellow of eleven years?

We asked him if he wouldn't like a ride on the flying horses, but he shook his head. They made him dizzy, he explained. We suggested other forms of entertainment, but he was not to be tempted. Most of our talk was in pantomime, his English being limited to "hello" and "o. k." and "thank you," and our Spanish being even less extensive. However, it is astonishing what can be done with smiles and gestures and emotions which mysteriously need no vehicle of expression.

He finally consented to try target-shooting—three shots

for a penny — and knocked down three pigeons, for which he was awarded a bit of cheap candy. This he insisted on our sampling first. Then, with that enchanting smile of his, he pointed down the street, and gave us to understand that there was something there he would like to show us. It began to dawn on us that he was accepting our generosity only to be polite; that his real desire was to show *us* a good time.

As we walked along he fumbled in his ragged pocket and brought out two marbles. These he pressed shyly into my hand. They were, I suspect, his sole worldly possession, but the only means he had of keeping his end up. My throat still aches a little when I think of those marbles.

We took him then to a shop and bought him a false face. We thought this would please him, but it was plain from the way he accepted it that he was indulging us in a childish fancy. If we wanted him to wear a false face, wear it he would, regardless of what it did to his dignity.

There were other things more worthy of our attention, he tried to tell us — or at least that was the way we interpreted his gestures and the few words we could understand. So we walked with him, round and round the square, until finally we said we were tired and wished to return to our hotel. We were not tired, but the pathos of that friendly little waif was more than we could longer endure. He offered to guide us home, and seemed really surprised when I gave him the few pennies I had in my pocket.

He stood on the corner, watching us go away. Each time we turned around he waved his hand. Always, when I think of Mexico, I shall remember that small figure, outlined against the lights of the carnival, waving his farewell.

## *Bandit or Patriot?*

There are moments when I wish I were a simple tourist, traveling comfortably in a conducted tour. How agreeable it would be to find a car waiting each morning to take one to an appointed place, to hear an expert summary of what the guide-books say about it, to see all the notable places in exactly the right amount of time, and at the day's end to have the assurance of a bed.

Rockier is the road of the independent traveler. And if to his weak craving for independence he adds the vice of curiosity his confusion grows at compound interest.

Churches, ruins, beautiful scenery, stay put from year to year. There they are. You ooh! and ah! them, and nobody contradicts you. But people—the twisted skein of motives and reactions that make human beings—change their color from minute to minute. There are no absolutes. You cannot say of a man that he is so many yards long by so many wide, or that he was built at a cost of so many pesos. He is this to one authority and that to another, and the more questions you ask about him the less, in the end, you know.

There is, for example, Zapata. To me he was just one of the many bandits with whom Mexican history has been so richly supplied. I knew, vaguely, that he had played some sort of part in the revolution of 1910, and that his achievements in laying waste the countryside had been notable. Nothing in what I knew of him prepared me for the fact that the street on which my hotel stands is Zapata street, or for the

fact that he is one of the two main figures in the famous Rivera murals of Cuernavaca.

From the collapsing fabric of my misinformation emerges the disconcerting fact that to a large part of the Mexican population Zapata corresponds to George Washington. Peasants speak of him reverently and with a sweep of their brown hands to the distant hills echo his battle cry, "Land and Liberty."

Zapata, it appears, was not a bandit, though he did go in for considerable rapine and pillage. He was a patriot, and the present Mexican government is one of the fruits of his labor.

And what of the present government? Cárdenas, said my taxi driver, was an honest man but a fool. The present government, said a man of affairs, had achieved new records in plain and fancy graft. The Indians, said a foreigner of long residence in Mexico, were farther from control of their destinies than they had been under any regime of Mexican history.

Dining in the home of upper class Mexicans I mentioned that I had had a talk with President Cárdenas. Instantly a chill settled over the conversation. It was as if I had said I had a touch of leprosy.

In the United States there are many who don't like Roosevelt. But I cannot imagine the keeper of a hotel in a small American town rejoicing over the fact that Roosevelt had spent the night in his town and had not stopped at his hotel. Yet President Cárdenas spent two nights in a provincial town recently, and when I asked the proprietor of the leading hotel if the president had graced his establishment the reply was not printable.

This maze of contradiction is thickest when we come

to the conflict of church and state. Consult a politician and he will assure you that the church, as a social force, is definitely through in Mexico. But travel the countryside at dusk of a Saturday afternoon and you will not be so sure.

The politician will tell you that only the women cling to the church. But men with brooms are sweeping the dusty road in front of the village church. They reverently remove their hats as they pass its entrance. Other men come, carrying pottery filled with flowers for the decoration of the altar.

Inside the church are children cleaning and arranging for the services of the morrow. Weakened, perhaps, is the hold of the church on these people, but not broken by any means. And if there is any lesson to be learned from history it is that what women cling to is not soon dislodged. Women are conservative by instinct, and they have forgotten more about the power of passive resistance than men will ever learn.

As in the rest of the world, great forces are contending for mastery in Mexico. The chief conflict, I think, is between reason and emotion, between planned economy and inherited tradition. The man drawing blueprints has against him the woman beating out tortillas on a flat stone. The new and the old jostle each other on every street. What is more, they jostle each other in the soul of every individual. What the antagonists seem to overlook is that religion can take new forms just as government can.

The churches are crumbling away now, but it would go counter to the evidence to assert that what built those churches is wholly dead.

## *Oremus*

Across the way a neon sign burned hotly red over a movie theater, announcing Tom Mix. On the street under festoons of electric lights (paid for by householders along the line of march) dragged the slow length of the carnival procession. At the head marched a solitary drummer. No ruffles or flourishes came from his sticks — just a monotonous thump, thump, thump, to which a company of school children in red jackets and white pantaloons kept listless step.

There were a few floats, to which costumed figures clung precariously and uncomfortably. On one of them two men dressed as bawds did an obscene version of the fandango. A group of Indians, on their way home from a two days' trek to a religious festival in a mountain village, stared bewildered and disapproving from under the wide brims of their straw sombreros. Their women and children, half-buried under their bundles, pressed closer to their burros and watched in grave wonder as a truck with signs advertising a patent medicine rolled by, the strains of "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie" thundering from its loud-speaker.

Here was the *new* Mexico — an austere, reserved, fatalistic, not very humorous people, doing their best to make whoopee in the modern manner, and not doing a very good job of it.

Vendors of confetti wandered about, with buyers scarce. Children in masks and dominoes flitted through the crowd

like dragonflies on a pond, giggling and cheerful — never rowdy. The women of the town, surrounded by their broods, each child tending one smaller than itself, stood on the side-walks, waiting. The procession had been advertised for three o'clock. It did not begin until after sundown. Nobody seemed to mind. As one said, it was not to be expected that processions would be held while the sun was overhead.

There was no excitement and almost no noise. Once or twice the crowd along the way clapped politely. A countryman dressed in the white suit of the Indian, sandals on his feet and a serape over his shoulder, and overfull of pulque, bumped and stumbled his uncertain way toward a forgotten destination. A policeman in a smart uniform of whipcord, with a pistol in a new leather holster, took him gently in charge.

Try as they would, these people could not quite achieve modernity. All the outward trappings were there — jazz, blare, lights and color, but the ancient habits of decorum were hard to lose.

From the barracks across from the movie theater came the bugles blowing retreat. From the steeple of the cathedral came the brazen clangor of the never silent bells. And from the church built by the son of Ferdinand Borde two centuries ago came the soft throb of an organ.

It was, literally, a step from 1937 to an ancient past. Moved by some instinct of flight from an unreal reality, I took that short step.

Only a handful of people was in the church — mostly old women in black shawls, and children. I counted only two men, outside the priest and the acolytes. The congregation sat clustered in the front pews. Nearly all bore lighted

candles which cast dancing and grotesque shadows on their bowed shoulders.

Presently they rose and in slow procession made the Stations of the Cross, singing in antiphonal chorus an Ave Maria that would send chills down the spine of even the most pagan. One by one the lights on the altar were extinguished, and one by one the candles of the worshipers followed suit. The priest disappeared. The church was dark and silent. The doors opened and, over the sound made by the sandaled feet of the congregation as they shuffled out, one could hear the amplifier of the patent medicine truck roaring, "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie."

Shall I deny that my eyes were moist? No, I shall not. But *why* were they moist? Perhaps it was in pity for myself — the nostalgia a "civilized" man feels for simple and primitive faith. We who are bewildered by the vast and unused riches of our knowledge have moments of envy for the unlettered who, accepting their own helplessness, acquire a peace that is beyond the sophisticated understanding, by commanding their souls to God.

I felt, as I emerged from that dark church, that I had experienced something like a revelation. I had suspected that the ultimate destiny of man was not in confetti and festoons of light and worship at the throne of the goddess of reason. The French tried that and failed. Now I was certain of it. Symbolic, the candles of the church had been put out, and the neon sign on the movie theater still burned. But the candles would be lighted again. All through man's history the candles of faith have been extinguished, but they have been relighted.

Or is history no longer to be trusted? The vestments of the priest were tattered, the very walls of his church were

crumbling in decay. Those who knelt before him were lame and halt and poor and very old. They must soon die. And then what?

I do not know. But man hungers for beauty as for bread, and I doubt if motorcars, electric light and a chicken in every pot will content him. The forms of his faith may change, but faith he must have. *Oremus.*

## *The Little Ones*

The traveler should keep always before him that shrewdest of the maxims of La Rochefoucauld: "All generalizations are false — including this one." It is so easy to jump to the general from the particular — and usually with such unfortunate results.

Nonetheless, I must set down the observation — along with the indisputable one that in nearly a month there has not been a day without sunshine or one cool enough to call for an overcoat — that I am yet to hear a Mexican child cry, except in extreme pain, and not very hard then.

I must report as a fact that the only child I have heard crying was an American child — and a very spoiled and badly behaved child he was at best.

Making allowance for my superficial observation, please accept my assurance that Mexican children treat one another with the most extraordinary consideration, and are treated by their elders with a kindness I have not seen exceeded anywhere on this heartless globe.

To a person with undue respect for sanitation and excessive respect for that branch of voodooism known as psychology, the conditions under which Mexican children live would seem deplorable indeed. They eat with the most serene disregard of vitamins, enzymes or the desirability of a balanced ration. They pay no heed to the elementary principles of hygiene. They wear the wrong clothes or none, and they keep dreadful hours. Infant mortality is undeniably high, and something should certainly be done about it. As a matter of fact, the

Mexican government *is* doing something about it, and with considerable rapidity conditions are changing.

Meanwhile, though death may overtake him sooner than our actuaries think reasonable, and though he may suffer from ailments from which modern science might protect him, the Mexican child seems to have an amazingly good time. His may be a short life, but from what one can see of it it is indeed a gay one.

He eats when and what he likes. He comes and goes as he chooses. He stays up until sleep overcomes him. And when American children are wistfully playing at being grown up the Mexican child takes on the responsibilities of an adult. The tourist may feel sorry for the ragamuffins scampering about in the germ-laden dust, but the ragamuffins certainly do not seem to feel sorry for themselves.

The Mexican home is one of the many reasons why this land is difficult to understand. Yesterday I visited a characteristic example. The way led through what the visitor would assume was a slum. That is, the streets were unevenly paved with small cobbles and the sidewalk was hardly more than a gesture. Most of the people one met were dressed in the simple garments of the peasant, and not a few were barefoot.

Presently we turned off from the "street"—a narrow canyon between houses with iron-barred windows—and turned into a lane. At its end was a door with a grilled peephole in it. The stone threshold was crumbling and the door was in sore need of paint. Beside it was a pushbutton, but after trying that for some time we reverted to the rusty iron knocker. This brought a servant, and in one short step we were in the luxury of Long Island.

Behind that ancient and forbidding door, with its iron-barred Judas, was a palace. It had I don't know how many

rooms — at least twenty, I should say; a huge swimming pool with heated water, set in a grove of mango trees and surrounded by a wealth of fruit and flowers; and birds sang in the trees as if we were in the heart of the jungle. In the house itself were all the triumphs of modern plumbing, and furniture that would have made a museum curator drool with ecstasy.

That is — or was — the Mexican's way of living. To the world his house presented a forbidding face, and only true friends could pass the great door that gave on the street. Once past that barrier the guest was of the household.

A home was not for show; it was to be lived in. In the great haciendas of the past, now mostly in ruins, this love of privacy reached its apex. Under one roof, surrounded by fortified walls, lived the patriarch and his descendants and all their retainers.

All that is changing now. The parvenus — the brisk fellows who have caught on to our quick ways of making money — the *politicos* and the speculators and the Levantines whose clever fingers are garnering the riches of Mexico, are building homes that suggest the boulevards of Hollywood.

Not for privacy are these homes; they are as showy as money and bad taste can make them. When you fly past them in your sight-seeing coach the guide tells you how much they cost. That is about all he can say about them.

## *What a Woman!*

Shipping a car to Mexico is, like smoking in bed, possible but not recommended. Some day it will be the thing to do. At this writing it demands more patience and fortitude than it is worth.

We shipped ours well in advance of our own departure. For a time there was silence. Then telegrams began to come, and special delivery letters enclosing documents that had to be signed in the presence of officials who either did not exist or were out of the country.

From this blizzard of paper one fact emerged. The car was stuck at the Texas border. After much signing and swearing (legal and profane) and communication by telephone and telegraph Mexican law was appeased, and the last lap of the journey began.

There was, however, miscellaneous baggage in the car. This, we learned from the telegrams which followed us all over Mexico, and which gradually lost all semblance of sense as they were copied and recopied by operators who understood no English, had been removed from the car and shipped separately by express.

Meanwhile, as we drove to Acapulco and back in a hired car, we were well pleased that our own vehicle was comfortably sheltered in some provincial freight house. There are some excellent Mexican highways, well provided with filling stations, but there are not many of them yet. And the Mexican roads that are not good are roads over which one will do well to travel in somebody else's car.

Nearly four weeks had elapsed when we returned to the capital and made inquiries about our car and baggage. By this time our fame had spread throughout the land, and our mere appearance in a railway office was the signal for all hands to bow their heads in pain. Early and late toiled the local agents of the Illinois Central—as helpful friends as a wayfarer ever encountered. How they must have cursed fool Americans who ship motorcars instead of riding in them! But their courtesy never wavered.

The Southern Pacific was also involved, so one day I dropped in to return the call of F. V. Stark, resident traffic manager of that system. Having got into the habit of asking all whom I met if they had heard about my car, I asked him.

“No,” said this amazing Englishman, born in Malta, master of Arabic and heavens knows how many other languages, and for thirty years a resident of Mexico. “But if you will come back at three o’clock I shall have all the information.”

Whereupon began the most astonishing afternoon I have experienced in this astonishing country.

By three o’clock car and baggage had been located in various parts of the city, and in charge of Jesús Moya, Oaxaca Indian and worker of magic, we set out to get it.

After standing for an hour before various counters of the freight yard Señor Moya discovered that we could not have the car without certain papers which we did not have. According to the textbooks, this should have been the end of the matter. This is a land of *mañana* and red tape, as anyone who has not been here can tell you. But Señor Moya refused to quit. An hour more of telephoning and conferences and shaking of heads and the car was ours to take out if we could.

The machine was located at the end of a mile-long freight

house. It had been there for days, but no one had known of its existence because it was buried under bales of hay and other merchandise. Extricating it, we started the job of getting it through an eight-foot doorway, making a right-angle turn to a platform eight feet wide, and again, at right angles, down a pair of planks to the street. It can be demonstrated mathematically that this is impossible. But with a dozen stevedores acting as jacks, and with the Little Corporal at the wheel, the miracle was performed.

There were moments when I was less than an inch from losing both car and wife, and the faces of all concerned were dubious. And when, at last, the car was on the ground, right side up, it was clear from the faces of the onlookers that all were in hearty agreement with the remark of one of the stevedores, who said to me fervently, "Señor, truly you have a woman!"

The express office was now closed, but no barriers exist for Señor Jesús Moya. There were more conferences, and presently our baggage was in our hands—with neither loss nor damage. The sun was setting as we headed for Cuernavaca, and the snowy face of Popocatepetl was a sheet of pale gold, the sky behind him a brocade of silver and turquoise and flame—an unforgettable ending to an unforgettable day.

Night overtook us as we entered the mountains, and I remembered that we had no jack in the tool box. I am still wondering what we would have done if we had had a flat tire!

## *More Fireworks*

Until last year there was nothing but a burro path to the mountain town of Tepotzlán, nestling in the shadow of pyramids as yet hardly touched, even by archaeologists. Now there is a road, passable for motorcars; and tourists, on their way to or from Taxco, are beginning to appear, guidebook in one hand, camera in the other.

Still, however, it remains largely a mystery to the visitor — even to the sophisticated Mexicans of nearby Cuernavaca. The other day I spent an afternoon in Tepotzlán watching the dress rehearsal of an amateur bullfight. Not satisfied, I jolted over the washboard road again yesterday and stood in the sun for hours trying to understand what I saw.

From one corner of the square came a group of elaborately masked and costumed figures, dancing aimlessly in the dust. That is, the dance seemed aimless; but presently one realized that it had a definite pattern, indefinitely repeated. Behind these figures marched a band of music, the players dressed in everyday clothes. Their tune, like the dance, was a simple one and it was repeated endlessly.

After this group of dancers and musicians had proceeded around the square at least a dozen times without a pause, a second group of performers, playing the same tune and doing the same steps, added themselves to the proceedings. In one corner a couple of solemn-faced Indians held a cord stretched between them, to which was attached a pack of firecrackers. Stolidly they held the string until the crackers exploded.

There was no excitement. The faces of the Indians, sitting or standing at every available vantage point, were impassive.

On went the dance and the music, never changing. The sun sank with tropic abruptness over the mountains; and we went away wondering what it had all signified. Until we were out of earshot we could hear the monotonous thumping of the drums.

In the evening in the plaza of Cuernavaca there was more bewilderment for the observer. The week of carnival was drawing to its close and the excitement — real or synthetic — was more evident. A man carrying a set piece representing a bull dashed erratically through the crowd. From his flaming burden came a shower of sparks, lighting the faces of the crowd of small boys who pressed close at his heels in venturesome delight. Occasionally a ball of fire would shoot from the bull's head and the crowd screamed in mingled terror and amusement. This, of course, was dangerous. Oh, yes, certainly — if the ball of fire hit anyone he would be badly burned. But then — it seldom hit anybody. Your Mexican friend shrugs his shoulders and lights another cigarette.

Danger, disorder, delight — these three were strangely interwoven. A steeple of flaming pinwheels had been erected squarely in the middle of the street and a line of motorcars honked their way under a cascade of falling sparks. Bombs went off under the feet of the close-packed crowds. Indian women, with children on and all about them, gazed at the tempest of sound and light as woodenly as I had gazed at the dancers of Tepotzlán.

And an American, flat on his face seeking shelter from the balls of fire cast off by the gunpowder bull, muttered hoarsely: "I thought Mexico was a place where the people did nothing but sleep. I'm going back to Broadway for a rest!"

Tipping is a problem in any land; but in Mexico the problem is insoluble. Its complexity was illustrated by what happened when I was getting my car out of the freight yard. A half-dozen stevedores had sweated in the hot sun for an hour, heaving until I thought their backs would break. I put my hand in my pocket, but one of them raised a dissenting hand. "It is not necessary to pay us extra," he said in a broken but understandable English. "We are paid our wages by the railroad. This is part of our duty."

There spoke the social revolution, the voice of the new, self-respecting Mexico, the Mexico which is trying to return to the dignity of the Indian. In between is the Mexico which has learned too well the American gospel of "get the money."

Mexico is a melting pot; and, as in all melting pots, there is dross on the top.

## *Land of Extremes*

This was — and is — a land of extremes. Great riches and great poverty live side by side. Elegance and cultivation are next door to ignorance, disease and filth. It is said that in the days of Díaz 95 per cent of the population could neither read nor write. Today illiteracy is estimated at 60 per cent, and falling fast.

Modern Mexico is fired with a passion for education. The masses are being awakened from a sleep of centuries, and what will come of their awaking no man can tell. For the first time in Mexican history a free and secular education is being made available to the poor. And that education begins with the very young.

This morning I visited a kindergarten, accompanied by the local director of education. Here, in schoolrooms with roofs but no walls — in this matchless climate one goes indoors only for the shade — I found as bright and happy a group of children as I have ever seen.

Some wore shabby clothing and some were barefoot, but all were clean. They were of all colors, from the deep chocolate of the pureblood Indian to the pale pink of a little girl with blue eyes and blonde curls who, it was said, was of Polish extraction.

There was the same degree of racial variation in the teachers. The one thing they had in common was zeal for their work and an obviously warmhearted sympathy for their small charges. These teachers are paid from eighty to a hundred pesos a month — say twenty-five dollars, American money.

In one room a group of children were making pictures of fruit, using colored crayons. In another room they were making designs with red beads. In the garden, beside a pool in which swam ducks and geese, a third group was planting twigs to which they fastened colored tissue paper to represent fruits and flowers. These last were preparing for what corresponds to our Arbor day and were studying roots and trees.

Later in the morning the whole school — a hundred or more tots from three to five years old — marched to their assembly hall, where, under the direction of a young teacher, they sang and danced. Two youngsters — not over four — executed a *pas de deux* with perfect poise and rhythm. In no American school are morning exercises more beautifully conducted.

On this day, it happened, the doctors arrived for their regular inspection, and we watched a group of small children, each armed with a cup and toothbrush, demonstrating what they had learned of oral hygiene.

Mexican educators are deeply concerned with fundamentals. The child is therefore scarcely out of the cradle before it begins to receive instruction in the principles of sanitation and good health. The first step is to make the child conscious of its physical self. The second is to make it aware of its relations to the group. As fast as it learns to talk the child is introduced to the idea of self-government. Before it can read it is looking at pictures painted on the walls of its schoolrooms — pictures which carry the message, in simple terms, of the "social revolution."

This particular school was in a fairly good neighborhood, and the children were not of the poorest. So, in order that I might have a broader understanding of the school system, I

went next to a rural school. This school was in a poor neighborhood, and was primitive indeed — a mere group of huts on a rocky hillside with a muddy ditch running past it. But the same earnest spirit was evident, both among pupils and teachers. It was no surprise to learn that much of the furniture — rude chairs and tables — had been built by the parents, and that the money for what little equipment there was had been contributed by people of the neighborhood — wage earners who make only two or three pesos a day.

There has been hostility to the new school system — the authorities admit it frankly. Also, there have been mistakes in its administration. Zealots and theorists have at times gone too fast and too far. But from what I have seen of the children — who, after all, are the final test of any educational system — the hostility born of ignorance and fear will not last long.

Parents, accustomed to other ways and doubtful of innovation, may purse their lips and shake their heads at what is being done with young Mexico; but young Mexico is clearly well pleased. The difficulty with young Mexico, say the teachers, is not getting him to come to school, but getting him to go home.

Incidentally, I might mention that the two schools I have described have been in operation only a little over a year. Rapid is the rate of change in Mexico these days.

## *Reaching for Light*

Having visited a city kindergarten and a rural primary school, I went next day to a grade school with several hundred pupils — and a waiting list!

As in all the schools the classrooms are shelters from the sun rather than rooms and, as in all the schools, the walls are illustrated lectures on the "social revolution." Here, as elsewhere, I found the same mixture of racial strains, the same predominance of coarse clothing, the same personal cleanliness, and the same enthusiasm for going to school. Here, too, was the same emphasis on self-government.

For example, the appearance of the director of education was the signal for a rush of boys and girls who had evidently been waiting for him. They clustered about him, presenting a paper for him to read. This, I learned, was a most formally worded request for a one hundred days' trial of a radio set. It went on to say that both pupils and teachers had benefited so much by the newspapers and magazines which the authorities had sent to them that they felt a radio would be equally instructive. This document was covered, front and back, with the signatures of boys and girls.

On another day I visited what is said to correspond to one of our junior high schools. The visit, like the others, was made without warning, and nothing, therefore, was staged for my benefit.

Morning exercises were beginning as I arrived, and I sat to one side with the principal — another zealot whose enthusiasm for his job was as great as his skin was dark — while

the chairman for the occasion was selected. This job fell to a lad in overalls, who mounted the stage and called for suggestions. Many of these came from a girl of fifteen—an Indian with skin that shone like polished ebony and strong white teeth that sparkled in a ready smile. I was not surprised to learn that she was one of the school leaders.

There was much discussion, all managed in the best parliamentary manner. The principal offered no suggestions. He sat quietly smoking a cigarette, explaining to me that the children must practice the forms of democracy if they were to be good citizens later. I could close my eyes and imagine myself at home, listening to an exponent of progressive education.

Finally it was decided that one of the girls give an address of welcome in English. This she did, without embarrassment and with a surprisingly good accent and choice of words. Then a boy in tattered dungarees came to the platform and, most movingly, recited a ballad, "*Quien sabe?*" There were other diversions, and after I had expressed my thanks, which were rendered by the principal into a Spanish that sounded far more eloquent than my own English, the whole school clapped politely, and then sang the school song, the Internationale and the national anthem.

When the hall was cleared I was shown the murals, executed by a pupil of Rivera. They depicted the old life of the haciendas—peons being plied with drink by the wicked overseers, as one way of holding them in peonage. Another depicted the old-fashioned school, with miserable pupils being whipped by a hatchet-faced old woman in a black dress with—significant touch—a cross at her bosom. The other pictures dealt with the new age—happy-faced workers marching side by side toward the light, with test-tubes and gear wheels symbolizing truth and power.

"Work and honesty," said the principal. "That is what the world needs."

The day in this school begins at six A.M. for the boys, seven A.M. for the girls. Hygiene and physiology are studied until breakfast. The period from nine to one is devoted to academic studies. From four to six thirty the time is devoted to manual training—pottery, carpentry, ironwork for the boys; sewing and domestic science for the girls. The work is practical and they make goods for sale. The profits are divided in proportion to the amount of work performed.

Just so the teachers won't feel time hanging heavy on their hands there is night school from seven to ten.

This school, too, has been in operation only a little over a year. Much of its equipment has been made by the pupils. In the laboratory I saw a homemade microscope, a sterilizing oven made from an old oilcan, a centrifuge constructed entirely of wood, and test-tubes fashioned from discarded electric light bulbs.

I left that school with awe in my heart. And when, outside, a beggar, diseased and repulsive, cringed whining at my feet, I felt less of the shame than is usually mine when I see the abasement of man. From time immemorial the masses of Mexico have been in darkness, inert and fatalistic, but they are reaching for the light. Hope is breaking through the clouds of this somber land and the sun is beginning to shine in the hearts of its people.

## *Pig in the Road*

We were told that in the hamlet of Jiutepec we would see a real fiesta — native life entirely untouched by modernity. We were also told that a good time to see the fiesta would be in the evening. I forget what else we were told, but this is enough to account for our visit to Jiutepec.

This hamlet was said to be just a little way from the high-road. Well, perhaps it is — in miles. But the little way has the largest number of bumps, chuckholes, stray animals and natives in all stages of inertia, from the merely somnolent to the advanced alcoholic, to be encountered anywhere. Furthermore, the dust and jagged rock, which for want of a better word is called a road, is the width of two cars with a sheet of paper between, and drops to deep ditches on both sides. It would be an affliction in broad daylight and with no traffic stirring. By night, alive with all forms of animal life, it is material for endless nightmares.

As we pitched and careened through this inferno, the suspicion deepened in my mind that no sensible person would visit Jiutepec by day, and that to visit it by night — especially a night of fiesta — was clear proof of insanity.

Suddenly the night air was rent by hideous squealing, and out of the darkness loomed dark brown faces pressing close against the windows of our car. It was obvious that the owners of these faces were not pleased. We had, it appeared, run over a pig.

What to do? If we left without doing something about it we were hit-and-run folk, subject, no doubt, to the severest

penalties. On the other hand, if we stayed we were likely to be torn limb from limb by a crowd which seemed to grow larger and angrier every moment. So, with a frightened bleat from our horn, we drove on.

It turned out that the slaughter of the pig had taken place just outside Jiutepec, and the muttering mob was still with us when we reached the town. There it was enlarged by sympathizers from the crowd in the plaza; and when we got out of the car it was to face the dark scowling of *agraristas* armed with rifles.

I am sure that the square, crowded with celebrants of the fiesta, must have been very quaint and picturesque. But at the moment we had eyes only for those angry men with guns.

We offered to pay roundly for that accursed pig; but from the rumble of talk it appeared not to be a question of money. We were where we weren't wanted, at best; and to have killed a pig on top of it — well, I gathered that only our blood would expiate our effrontery.

Masklike faces, gleaming red and black in the flicker from gasoline torches, pressed close to mine; and a woman, baring long white teeth, pinched me vigorously. All, I decided, was lost. And then, out of the darkness, came the welcome khaki of the Mexican police — may their shadows never grow less!

The two officers listened for a moment to the recital of our crimes and misdemeanors, and then chased the crowd away. They also dismissed our offer of reimbursement. People should not let their pigs lie in the road, they said. Roads were for travelers — not for pigs. Whereupon, without saying anything but gently easing us onward, they escorted us toward the church. Subtly but clearly they made us understand

that we were where we should not be, and that the sooner we got away the sooner a load would be off their minds.

Inside the candle-lighted church little girls in white were solemnly dancing to the scratch of a fiddle. "Very interesting — no?" asked one of the policemen, lighting a cigarette from a candle borne by a kneeling old woman.

Yes, it was very interesting. Also very quaint and picturesque. One of our party was so enthralled by it that he was unaware his hip pocket was being slit and his wallet deftly removed. My own thoughts, I fear, were less on the picturesqueness of the scene than on the problem of getting home. I thought it more than likely that those men with rifles would be waiting for us.

Some such thought seemed also to be in the minds of the policemen; for one got into the car with us, and the other stood on the running board, blowing his whistle when anyone got in the way. The two rode with us all the way to the highroad. Both seemed visibly to exude relief when they waved us farewell.

The moral of this tale is: Don't go to fiestas at night if you are going to run over pigs on the way. There may not be any of those friendly Mexican policemen around to take care of you.

## *Sweet Do-Nothing*

In 1716 a young Frenchman named Joseph le Borde set sail to seek his fortune in New Spain. History records that he found it in the silver mines of Taxco, and here in Cow's Horn (to translate the inaccurate Spanish translation of the Aztec word for Cuernavaca), where stout Cortez had spent his vacations, Borde built a retreat suitable for such a millionaire as he had become.

Time has laid a heavy hand on the Borda Gardens. Walks and walls are crumbling and broken. The mangoes—joy of le Borde's heart—have fought a losing battle with the fruit fly. But not even the pressure of two hundred years has been sufficient to obliterate the incredible tranquillity of this place.

Tourists stream endlessly past the chamber where Maximilian took his ease; and around the pool where Carlotta paddled in the moonlight is a litter of black paper from the film packs of amateur photographers. But the red berries of the coffee plant still burn against the tropic green, the fountains still trickle if they do not splash, the birds still sing in the branches of the laurel, and the purple mountains still smile through their collars of cloud.

An Italian named Giacomini, assisted by his Mexican wife, "the Little Duchess," now operates a hotel in what was the palace of le Borde—and what a strange hotel it is! There is no dining room, all meals being served outdoors on the porch which, through the years, has acquired a decided list to starboard.

There are only a few rooms and the turnover among the permanent boarders is not great. People have a way of coming to spend a few days, only to linger on for months. It is so easy to get the habit of sitting for hours, doing nothing except watch the changing shadows on the pool, or listen to the mournful chant of the gardeners as they sweep the lawns free of leaves.

Breakfast, and for an hour afterward one lives in exquisite indolence. Then the tourists begin to arrive, en route to or from Taxco; and the Borda Gardens become a cross between Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon and the lunchroom of the Grand Central.

With twilight peace comes again, and soon after dark the great doors on the street are closed. Then there is quiet, broken only by bugle calls from the nearby barracks, the cast-iron bells of the cathedral tolling the hours, and the singing of mosquitoes.

After a period of probation in which we occupied a bathless chamber we were moved to a bungalow-apartment in a garden of our own. Here, with the most modern plumbing, the lastest thing in mattresses and the most solicitous attention of a smiling, soft-voiced Indian chambermaid, we slip into languorous desuetude, and the question of how many justices there should be on the Supreme Court seems as remote as anything on Mars.

The cost of this luxury, I might mention, is six dollars and seventy-two cents a day for two persons, and includes three excellent meals. And if you weary of quaint markets, old churches and views, there is a golf course of spectacular beauty and first-class golfing quality near by, for which the greens fee is eighty-four cents — caddies, twenty-eight cents a round.

There are some peculiar aspects about life in the Borda

Gardens. One, which from the expression on their faces has been most disturbing to the tourists who have observed it, is the fact that the only access to our bungalow is through a door marked "Ladies." This sounds — and is — peculiar, and can be fully explained only by a diagram.

This morning I was asked by a tourist — droll how we old-timers of three weeks look down on the fretful newcomer! — what I did with my time. When I told her she pursed her lips and returned to studying her guidebook. She seemed to think I had gone native. As a matter of fact, she was more than half right.

Ho hum! It is noon now, and the sun rides hot in the heavens. The birds have sought shade and there is a clatter of crockery from the kitchen, indicating that the personally conducted tours are beginning to arrive. A stray intruder in my garden has already caught sight of me in my pajamas. The world is with me once more, and I must dress the part. It gets harder every day. I think I must leave the Borda Gardens soon or I shall never leave them at all.

## *Allo! Allo!*

Have I mentioned the climate of Cuernavaca? Well, it is worth mentioning again. In fact, it is worth mentioning several times a day. It is the most notable climate of my experience. When the sun is high it is warm and enervating, and all but mad dogs and tourists seek the shade. When night falls it is cool enough for two blankets. There is sunshine every day, and practically no rain at this time of year.

Also, may I again mention the subject of banditry? One of my home town newspapers has caught up with me, and in it is a letter advising travelers to Mexico to provide themselves with bulletproof vests and an arsenal of submachine guns. In the same newspaper is an account of a holdup on my home town's principal thoroughfare.

Now there *is* banditry in Mexico. But from all that I have been able to learn there is less per square mile and per thousand of population than there is in the United States. And banditry in Mexico is ceasing to be the pastime it was once said to be. A year or so ago, for example, an American was kidnaped. The story is that the criminals were promptly captured and as promptly shot. Not only that, but every male inhabitant over fourteen of the village where the crime took place was also shot.

I cannot vouch for the whole truth of that story, but I *can* attest to the fact that any sort of maltreatment of tourists is severely dealt with in Mexico today.

To the plaza, last night, and stood for an hour watching the crowd walk slowly round and round the bandstand—

men on the inside, going in one direction, women on the outside, going in the other. One young Indian mother, her baby wrapped tight to her breast, made the circle eleven times by my count. How many circuits she had made before we arrived, or how many after we left, I do not know.

The band played selections from Victor Herbert, and between times the radio kept the air filled with sound. The people alone made no noise. They varied in age from infants barely able to toddle to crones hobbling on sticks; but all were solemn. Now and then a venturesome boy might throw a little confetti, or even go so far as to take a girl from the procession and get her an ice-cream cone. This was the maximum lapse from gravity that one could observe. It was notable when some youngster so far forgot decorum as to break into a run.

In the other park a crowd had gathered. From its center came the sound of a marimba. Working through the on-lookers, packed six deep, we found the cause of the excitement. It was a group of venturesome moderns dancing American fashion. The Indians gazed at this spectacle wide-eyed, and, I suspect, disapproving.

At one corner of the Borda Gardens is a little *mirador*, or lookout, whence one has a beautiful view of the valley and the sunset. A dozen feet below runs a dusty road with a couple of thatched hovels beside it.

To this point comes every tourist who visits Cuernavaca — and that means practically every person who comes to Mexico. The appearance of visitors looking over the parapet is the signal for children to spring out of the ground. With one voice they cry: "Allo! Allo!" their little brown faces smiling

hopefully up. Without fail there is a shower of coins — and since, to the new-laid tourist, a peso is only a trifle over a quarter, the total is considerable.

I should guess that at least a hundred tourists come to the Borda Gardens every day. On Sundays there are twice as many. They all visit the *mirador*, and nearly all toss coins. In a year or two the owner of that thatched hovel will be buying the Borda Gardens.

Next to "Allo!" the English word which seems to have struck its roots deepest into Mexico is "o. k." It is in the vocabulary of every child. A close second is "Watcheka" — which, it turns out, means "Watch your car?" Wherever you stop a swarm of gamins appears from nowhere, all shouting this phrase. You select one or more of the likeliest and go about your business. It may be after midnight when you return, but your small guardians will be waiting for you, politely grateful for the pennies you give them.

Ask an Indian where a place is and he will drop everything to direct you to it. Offer him money for the service and you will make an enemy. He will be as insulted as you would be were the positions reversed. But halt your car in a village square and there will be a swarm of small boys whining, "Watch your car?" if they are linguists; or merely "*Centavos, centavos*" if they are not.

It is difficult for the American to grasp the fact that a peso is real money to the average Mexican. But the minimum wage in Mexico is only two pesos a day, and there are chiseling employers who pay less. There are those who fear that the American habit of tossing money about will "spoil" the Mexicans. I doubt it. Even in such a tourist center as this the native goes about his business in complete indifference to

the visitor. I have never seen people so set in their ways as are the Mexicans. They are incurious and fatalistic; and I have a suspicion that under their grave courtesy is an idea that our behavior is very similar to that of the monkey.

## *Revolutionary Weapon*

Once again let me urge anyone contemplating a trip to this country to make all hotel reservations well in advance. The demand for beds exceeds the supply. The same is true of railway accommodations. For the young and venturesome and mechanically minded, who besides having a full kit of tools can speak Spanish, the best way to roam this country would be by trailer. A few have done it already, and I predict that there will be more in future. Meanwhile, you would do well to entrust your routing to a railroad, express company or travel agency. Even then you will have your troubles. In Mexico telegrams have a way of never arriving, or of arriving in a form that nobody can read.

Mexico is a paradise for painters, with a picture at every turn. It is almost as exciting for the amateur photographer. And here, also, is a word of advice: Take plenty of film with you. Except in the capital, it is not easy to get.

Speaking of pictures, I had a warm argument last night with a well known American painter. He took the position that the function of art was to convey aesthetic satisfaction; that in mural painting its function was limited to the decorative. Art, he said, must exist for itself. When it delivered a message, when it became propagandist, it ceased to be art.

Now this is a position I have often taken myself. I, too, have argued that the painter should paint pictures and not advertisements. But since I have been in Mexico I have begun to wonder about this.

In Mexico there has been a great renaissance of the fresco.

Rivera, Orozco and many capable though less known men have been doing work that is important socially no less than artistically. It is significant that the two major "sights" in Cuernavaca, for example, are the Borda Gardens and the Rivera murals in the palace of Cortez—now the town hall. These are "musts" for all tourists. It is interesting to note that the Borda Gardens were built by a mining king and philanthropist of the eighteenth century, and that the Rivera murals were paid for by an American ambassador, Dwight Morrow.

The fresco painting of Mexico is not "art" in the old aristocratic sense. Rivera and Orozco and the others have not painted for the pleasure of a few rich patrons. They have painted for the instruction of the masses. In a land where until recently only a handful of the population could read, the picture is enormously important. It becomes a powerful instrument in the teaching of history and social theory.

It is true, of course, that when the painter becomes frankly propagandist his history may be garbled and his social theory may be false. Rivera, for example, is a thorough communist, and in his work shows little reverence for the gods of capitalism. He is as hostile to the bankers of Wall street as he is to the conquistadors of Cortez. But in this respect he is less an influence than a symptom. His art and his ideas are not so much propaganda as they are the expression of the thought of the inarticulate masses. In his frescoes—cartoons, as they are scornfully labeled by orthodox painters—the unlettered peon sees his aspirations and his resentments made logical and coherent.

Mural painting is not, therefore, a mere incident in the life of modern Mexico, as most painting is an incident in the life

of modern United States. It is an integral and extremely important part of Mexican life today. It is to be found in communities which have no moving pictures, and it stirs the emotions of people who cannot read.

It was my American friend's contention that the murals of Orozco had no place in Dartmouth College, and that Rockefeller did right when he removed the Rivera frescoes from Radio City. I am inclined to agree with him, since the work of these Mexicans is neither of nor for what we assume to be American culture. On the other hand, what we assume to be American culture may really be as obsolete as the pyramids, and the culture which is beginning to emerge below the Rio Grande may forecast what will one day be ours.

In the schools of the United States there is a little effort — not much — to teach appreciation of the fine arts. Here and there one sees a reproduction of a Rembrandt or a bit of Greek sculpture. But by no stretch of the imagination could painting be called a subject of vital interest to the American school child. It is different in Mexico. Here the walls of the school-room are covered with paintings illustrating the cons and pros of the social revolution. Here the painter has a great and intensely interested public. Here his power is recognized. Here he is honored equally with the man of action.

## *Emerging from Darkness*

My friend the schoolmaster, Maestro José Pedroza, begins his day's work at six A.M. and ends at ten P.M. When he rests I do not know. I have never met a man more vital or more zealous. In repose his face is tired. But so much as mention education and his eyes burn hot behind their thick spectacles.

Last night I visited the evening school, and I must say that I never had a more moving experience. Young and old sat side by side in the classrooms, their flesh weary from the day's labor (these were all working-class people), but their spirits athirst for learning. For them the long night of the Mexican masses was coming to an end.

For four hundred years Cuernavaca has been a pleasure resort for the wealthy. Since Cortez built his palace here elegance and culture from all over the world have come to bask in its sunshine and inhale the perfume of its flowers. But until last year there was no high school for the poor, and until a few months ago there was no evening school for those who had to make their living by day.

When Horace Mann was preaching the gospel of mass education in the United States only a few generations ago many protested, saying that to give the keen-edged sword of knowledge to the common people would result in trouble. Today there are not lacking folk who insist that these protesters were right — that we would not be having so much unrest if the common man had not been taught to read and acquire ideas that were not good for him.

In Mexico there are some who look with glum disfavor on the spread of public schools. They assure me that the Indian

and the ignorant mestizo were much better off before they began to study economics and prate nonsense about land and liberty.

Maybe so. But I prefer to believe that man's ascent from the primeval ooze has been on the ladder of education. And I was far from pessimistic about Mexico when I watched a young instructor, aided by a black Indian and a couple of these "ignorant mestizos" one hears so much about, taking microphotographs of the calcium salts in a sliver of onion skin.

This was being done with the crudest kind of apparatus — bits of tin and cloth and wire and an ordinary camera. The government allowed so little money for equipment, said the instructor sadly. Except for the microscope — recently received — all the apparatus for teaching physics, chemistry and biology was homemade.

There has been — and still is, here and there — opposition among the people themselves to the idea of public schools. But for every tale that one hears about the reluctance of the peasants to accept modern notions there are a dozen that illustrate the reverse tendency.

I heard today, for example, of the Indian who trudged afoot all the way to the capital to ask the authorities to establish a school in his community. The ministry of education looked into the matter and replied that since the Indian's community was not even a village, there could be no school.

Back plodded the Indian to his distant home, where he held council with his neighbors. If it was necessary to have a village in order to have a school, a village they would have. Toiling in their spare time they proceeded to build a village, even including a hospital. As the final touch of realism, they cut down trees, stripped them of branches and put them in holes at intervals along the road to represent telegraph poles.

When this was all done the Indian walked again to the capital. "Now," he said, "we have a village. May we have a school?"

Yes, he got the school, and some two hundred and fifty children attend it.

When you hear tales like this you understand why the men and women who are working so hard and at such small pay to open the minds of the Mexican masses are so filled with exaltation. If Cortez and his friars brought the first torch of modern learning to this continent, these humble teachers are spreading its light into corners never reached before. They are the new conquistadors, and I, for one, salute them.

## *Accurate but Untrue*

He flitted in at twilight, a dusty moth, worn and weary with his efforts to keep off the beaten path. Self-righteous was his disdain for "tourists."

"They roll in a groove," he said. "Three days in the capital, taking in a bullfight, a pelota game, a trip to the pyramids and the shrine of Guadalupe, the floating gardens, the castle of Chapultepec, and lunch at San Angel.

"Then to Cuernavaca; Taxco and possibly Acapulco. If they aren't entirely exhausted they go back to Mexico and take a trip to Uruapan or Oaxaca or both. They may even get to Orizaba, where they visit the market and as many churches as their tired feet will allow. And so, home, having 'seen' Mexico."

His voice was scornful as he gave this itinerary — and it is an accurate one — of the average visitor. Not for him was such ordered routine. He has his own car and he goes only to places that have not been "spoiled" by foreigners. It is his firm conviction that he is really getting at the heart of Mexican life.

Somehow he puts me in mind of the Indian agent I once met in Santa Fe. I asked him if he understood the Indians. "Well," he said, "the first year I was out here I understood 'em fine. The second year I understood 'em so well I nearly wrote me a book about Indians. But that was forty years ago. I wouldn't say, now, that I understood Indians."

This business of getting off the beaten track is to my mind largely illusion. It is one thing to speak enough Spanish to

get around—to be able to ask “how far?” and “how much?” It is another thing to speak Spanish well enough for conversation on delicate and abstract subjects. And it is still a third thing to penetrate the racial barriers which rise high behind those of language.

This is true in any country. It would take many months of residence in a Norman village, for instance, before one could begin to grasp the queer combination of fortitude and dour suspicion which is the Norman character. It would take at least a year and hard study of Provençal before one could be on speaking terms with the soul of southern France. In Mexico the difficulties in the way of understanding are almost insurmountable; for Mexico is not European, it is Asiatic.

Most of what a traveler writes is nonsense because he falls continually into the mistake of drawing conclusions. He believes too much of what he hears and tends to consider every conversation typical.

Suppose, for example, that I interviewed three Mexicans—a college professor, a politician and a man of large affairs. Each assured me that the present government was dictatorship in disguise; that the ignorant masses were being swayed by unscrupulous agitators; that communism was rearing its horrid head in high places; that, in general, the future of the land was dark.

I would be tempted to dash off an article on the public opinion of Mexico. I refrain from dashing off that article because I have lately had long conversations with three Americans—a college professor from Wisconsin, a member of the Ohio legislature and a California businessman. Each viewed the trend of American government with undisguised alarm; each deplored the tendency to mob rule and class consciousness; each was admittedly skeptical of democracy. Had a

Mexican journalist interviewed these men he could have drawn a picture of life in the United States which would have been as dismally untrue as it would have been verbally accurate.

The moral of all this is that one cannot get the truth by merely noting the words of one man — or a thousand. The truth — if there be such a thing — is a composite of what is seen and heard and experienced, but most of all *felt*. And no great part of that truth is ever to be imprisoned in any loose-woven net of words.

The only conclusion I have been able to reach about Mexico is that Mexico, like the rest of the world, is split wide between left and right. The conversation of a Mexican landowner or businessman is indistinguishable from the conversation of an American of similar status. The Mexican farmer and artisan have substantially the same ideas as their American prototypes. In Mexico, as elsewhere, there is the same cleavage between the haves and the have-nots; the same cruel, wasteful struggle for economic democracy; the same tangle of idealism and political chicane.

I asked one Mexican what he thought of Cárdenas and he answered, "He is like Roosevelt." I asked another Mexican the same question and the answer was the same. The difference was in the tone of voice. The difference was enormous. And there, as the French say, you are.

## *Atrocities*

Here is an excerpt from a letter, postmarked Chicago:

“ I have long hoped that a journalist as discerning as yourself would visit Mexico and tell the truth about it. I had such high hopes when you started out, but you have let me down. . . . The real Mexico is so different from your impressions of it that those who know it well are chuckling over the ease with which you have been deceived, and sighing over your lost opportunity. . . . If you have the courage to elude your official guides and go alone into the country you will see that what happened in Mexico under Obregón in 1924 is being repeated under Cárdenas and Trotzky in 1937. . . . I dare you to see the *real* Mexico and tell the truth about it.”

Ah me, I have hunted hard for the “ real ” Mexico, but four weeks proves not enough time for the finding of it. True, I have found Manuel the *mozo* and Ignacia the maid-servant and Pedroza the schoolmaster and Eduardo the ex-hacendado, and many more. I have talked to rich men and beggar-men and men who I suspect were thieves. All “ real ” enough, heaven knows, but still Mexico eludes me.

I take some comfort in the experience of Dwight Morrow when he came down here to be ambassador. He gathered a group of Americans — old-timers here — and asked them to give him the truth about Mexico. Up spake the Nestor of them all — a resident here for forty years. “ Ask any tourist who has been here overnight,” said this man. “ He can tell you more than I can.”

A visitor like myself deals inevitably with the surface of

things. He may guess that the rich brocade of Mexican life has a seamy side, but if he is honest he will keep his reports to what he has seen and felt, and be careful about what he has merely heard. I repeat, therefore, that what I have personally experienced of Mexico has been gracious and agreeable, and at no time has my tour been officially conducted.

If I have been hoodwinked by appearance and have under-emphasized the uglier aspects of Mexican life, my fault has been no greater than if I had confined my observations to poverty, disease, drunkenness, inadequate hotel accommodations and the crimes of revolution. For to no country do Shakespeare's words apply so aptly as they do to Mexico — "a skein of mingled yarn, of good and ill together."

Mexico is no paradise. Much of its water is unsafe to drink. Salads are dangerous and pork is doubtful. I am told, by people who ought to know, that typhus, dysentery, malaria and syphilis are widely prevalent. Some doctors say that Mexico City is no place for anyone with a pulmonary complaint. Some say that it is no place for people of any sort. An American bacteriologist assures me that the worst sanitary conditions in Mexico are found in lovely Xochimilco — whence come most of the vegetables for the capital.

Poverty — hideous poverty — is to be seen everywhere — though I must say that I have seen few cases of what seemed to me malnutrition. Many if not most Mexicans live miserably, dress in rags, and have a death rate that must be appalling. These people are picturesque, but the charm evaporates when you come close enough to see them picking lice from their hair.

I have never been in India, but a man who has tells me that there is nothing there to equal the squalor to be seen in Mexico — especially in its capital.

I have found even the poorest Mexicans to be gentle and courteous, but I have heard dreadful stories of what they can do when aroused. I have heard, in detail, what they have done to priests and nuns and aristocrats, and, lately, what they have done to government schoolteachers. These are horrible tales, and true, I have no doubt. But I continue to believe that they are isolated instances of the sort of savagery which is not unknown even in the enlightened U. S. A.

I have heard many unpleasant tales—equally true, I am sure—of men dispossessed of lands or business. But again it must be remembered that not even the United States has been guiltless of expropriation. What did we do to the slave-owners? What did we do to the brewers and distillers?

Dear reader, you who dare me to tell the “truth” about Mexico, please do not forget that Mexico is still in the throes of social upheaval, and a revolution does not halt to split the hairs of justice.

Nor is a revolution, awful as it is, ever wholly one-sided.

“The wages of sin is death, even if the sin be economic and the sinner unconscious of wrong,” says a Mexican who was once a great landowner and is now a garage mechanic. “The lands I inherited from my ancestors stretched as far as the eye could see. I was lord of all therein, the beasts of the field, the trees and growing things, and the people. I treated them well—or thought I did. I fed and clothed and housed them, I had schools for them and I cared for them when they were ill. They produced great wealth for me, which I spent at my ease abroad. I did not know what my overseers and managers were doing to produce wealth for me—and themselves. The rich men of your country had better not make the same mistake.”

## *The Modern Touch*

Getting into any hotel is hard enough in Mexico these days, with a dozen tourists for every available bed. But getting into the Reforma is like being listed in the *Almanach de Gotha* or being tapped for *Skull and Bones* at Yale. I managed it only through the good offices of that excellent travel agent, Enrique Aguirre. He seems able to manage things that nobody else — not even General Motors — can manage. (Mr. Sloan was turned away and, for all I know, had to sleep in one of his service stations.)

The Reforma is Mexico's deluxest hotel — and it is about as Mexican as the Ziegfeld Follies. One is startled to hear Spanish spoken there. In its bathrooms are cloths for wiping razors and separate faucets for ice water. There are concealed lights in its closets and you call Room Service on a telephone lacquered to match the color scheme of your room. Its doors have buzzers and there is a drugstore downstairs where you can get ice-cream sodas.

The waiters wear dress suits and the wine steward has a gold chain around his neck. The rooms are made up while you are at breakfast and you can buy *Time* at the newsstand. It is, in short, as beautifully appointed and well managed a hostelry as you will find anywhere.

It was instructive, tonight, to sit in the great dining room and watch the customers. Many of the men wore dinner jackets and their women even went in for ermine and silver fox. It was what is known in the trade as a classy crowd. Also it was a crowd accustomed to getting what it wanted, no

matter how much one had to slip into the headwaiter's hand to get it. The gents, most of them slightly on the paunchy side, were of the sort that look like Roman emperors, and are obviously accustomed to command. When they didn't get the tables they wanted they spoke about it, and in no faint tone. What the hell, weren't they Americans and spenders? They didn't care what it cost. They wanted the best.

The entrance looked like the corridor of the Commodore Vanderbilt when there is a big crowd and only one diner. Headwaiters scurried about, promising, soothing, whimpering about "reservations," and finally demonstrating that to him who talks loudest and with the most cash shall be given. Meanwhile the band was playing quaint native folk songs like "Dancing Cheek to Cheek" and waiters poured champagne and served the four peso table d'hôte — which is only a dollar twelve our money, but is tops for Mexico.

Architecturally the Reforma is a triumph of the modern mode. It symbolizes what is going on in Mexico. The old folk cling to the colonial, with its patios and great doors barred tight against the world. The poets and the idealists favor the Aztec. The new-rich go in for expensive variants on the worst of Hollywood. And the forward thinkers build with glass and aluminum and planished copper in disturbing curves and angles and great effectiveness.

Before I finish my requiem over the Reforma and return once more to Mexico I must mention the tearoom on the roof. There, if you don't mind being deafened by a jazz band, you can sit and enjoy one of the most notable views in the world. The city lies spread before you in its ever changing degrees of whiteness, and for a backdrop there are Popocatepetl and the maid to whom he was faithless in life, sleeping forever beside him. That is, you can see them when the clouds and the dust

storms, which are a feature of the winter season, do not get in the way. In any event, I should star the Reforma roof garden as one of the sights in Mexico, D. F. Lunch is three pesos, and it takes as long to get as it does in cheaper places.

This mention of eating suggests Paolo's again. If that isn't one of the best restaurants in the world, it is certainly one of the best in this city. It has the rare quality of urbanity. It is sophisticated and serene. Nothing can disturb its suave equanimity. Last night, for example, I was feeling the altitude and there was no hunger in me. When the headwaiter himself came to take my order I was a little embarrassed at ordering only orange juice, despite the fact that it is the Mexican custom to eat lightly in the evening. But the order was taken and served as if it had been for peacocks' tongues and *crepes suzettes* and Chateau Rothschild, 1929.

That is what I mean by the *urbanity* of Paolo's. I am sure the treatment would have been the same if I had ordered a single peanut. It put me in mind of the time that F. Scott Fitzgerald won the plaudits of all the gourmets of Paris when he went into Voisin's, that mecca of epicures, and after long contemplation of the menu ordered a ham sandwich!

What a man! cried the gourmets. He knew what he wanted and had the courage to ask for it. Only at Voisin's, they said, would such a man be honored. (Shortly thereafter, I regret to add, Voisin's went out of business!)

## *Crooks and Crackpots*

The midnight bells are tolling and besides being dizzy with the altitude I am a bit sleepy. The irony of this is that once in bed I shall not be sleepy at all. After one has been in the lowlands, the first few days on the plateau are something of a strain on the constitution. One's strength is not as great as it seems; the newcomer will be well advised to rest between his visits to bullfights, cathedrals, markets and the other sights that all visitors must see.

Tomorrow I must rise early and be off to Puebla. And as I trim sails for my voyage overland to the uncharted wilds southward, I am reminded again of what Prescott said in his introduction to *Life in Mexico*, by Madame Calderón de la Barca — letters written in 1839 and still in the front rank of guides to Mexico:

“Without knowing the language of the lands he visits, a traveler is as much at fault as a man without an eye for color in a picture gallery, or an ear for music at a concert. He may see or hear, indeed, in both, but *cui bono?* The traveler, ignorant of the language, may possibly meet a native or two, half denaturalized, kept to dine with strangers, at his bankers. But as to the interior mechanism of society, its secret sympathies and familiar tone of thinking and feeling, he can know no more than he could of the contents of a library by running over the titles of strange and unknown authors packed together on the shelves.”

These true words ring in my ears when I attempt to set

down my impressions of Mexican politics. The picture is at best obscured by clouds of conflicting opinion, and it is difficult to get anyone who knows anything to express himself with candor. When I asked one man who I knew could tell me much, he smiled and said, "There is a Spanish proverb that fools, like fish, are caught by the mouth."

The men who have something to say will not talk. And those who will talk have nothing to say worth listening to. All the reporter can do is keep his ears open, pick up what unconsidered trifles he can, and, by seasoning his patchwork of fact with a liberal admixture of intuition, come to some sort of conclusion.

Though, as one Mexican expressed it, one should never come to conclusions about Mexico. Conditions change as rapidly and completely as the cloud formations that are forever altering the aspect of the sky. What of the future? The only answer is a shrug of the shoulders and a fatalistic, *Quién sabe?*

Here, perhaps more vividly than anywhere else, one sees the conflict between idealism and practical politics. My impression is that Cárdenas is an honest man, a sincere man, with a real faith in the ability of the masses to improve their condition, become educated and govern themselves. Around him are men who offer lip service to his proposals but spend their waking hours quietly lining their pockets.

This, of course, is not unprecedented. Hopelessly mingled in any land are the aspirations of the crowd and the behavior of its leaders. The sentimentalist looks only at noble purposes and takes words at their face value. He is no more foolish than the cynic who sees nothing but the selfishness of individuals. Both see only a part of the picture. The visionary is no more to be dismissed than is the spoilsman, though the extent to

which each is influenced by the other can never be accurately measured.

The ideology of the present Mexican government is socialistic and altruistic. It unquestionably has the support of the mass of the people and is not wholly repudiated even by the educated minority. If the latter scoff at the government's attempt to do what they call impossible things, they admit the government has already done things which seemed impossible. Everybody agrees that the country is enjoying a boom, though there are various opinions as to what caused it.

But fattening in the shelter of the government's idealistic program are men who are doing very well for themselves by serving the republic. There are hangers-on, indistinguishable in manner and appearance and technique from their brethren of the United States, about whom tales are whispered and who, even to the casual eye of the visitor, have prospered rather more than any services they might render could justify.

Yes, there is graft in Mexico, and money talks, as it does elsewhere. If one stopped at that and concluded that the destinies of this nation were in the hands of this tight-lipped gentry, with their bodyguards flitting about, one might be pessimistic. But parasites of this sort seem to be part of the price that democracy has to pay for its progress. They are annoying, and in time science will find a way to dispose of them, as it has of other bacteria.

## *Mingled Yarn*

The altitude of the capital is hard on liver and heart. The visitor should therefore go lightly on liquor and tobacco and should realize that the energy he feels is a mirage. These are precisely the things that most visitors don't do. They spend their days in sight-seeing—the hardest kind of work—and, after a heavy dinner, step out to a night club. That they don't pay a higher price for their folly is only another instance of how much punishment the human frame can take without cracking.

While in this advisory mood, let me offer another suggestion—carry your money in bills or coins of small denomination. Change is the hardest thing there is to find in Mexico, and it sometimes takes an hour to find someone who can break a peso. Carrying change, however, is hard on the pockets. It is no accident that the word "peso" means "weight."

Slowly the complex thing which is Mexican politics begins to clarify in my mind. As I begin to understand—or think I do—my doubts as to the future of the country increase. Mexico seems, at times, like a vast keg of dynamite which must some day go off in an explosion similar to that which has destroyed Spain.

The conditions in the two countries are similar. On the one hand you have the landowning class—cultivated, enterprising and not so much hostile to political and economic democracy

as ignorant of it. This group is almost wholly white and of foreign extraction, more or less remote. As a group it is sympathetic to the church.

On the other hand you have a group of contrasting elements. At one end are the idealists, men who have read and traveled and theorized along what we call radical lines. At the other end are politicians and demagogues who have raised the art of graft to new levels.

The prize for which these two groups contend is the Indian population — a densely ignorant, superstitious, peaceful, obstinate mass of human beings who remain as essentially pagan as their ancestors, and many of whom do not even speak Spanish.

This great unorganized mass (there is a wide variety of language, custom and even physical characteristics within it) has never controlled the country and does not, except indirectly, now. It is merely the raw material with which agitators fashion thrones for themselves. If today it shouts “Viva Cárdenas!” and votes for land and liberty, it may tomorrow, yielding to other promisers, vote for someone else.

This, of course, would be in the tradition of our own democracy, where from time to time we forge new keys to heaven and throw the old ones away. But the Indians of Mexico are not schooled in the give-and-take of politics, as we understand politics. The Mexicans are intense and without humor. They cannot lose a political battle and with a grin get ready for the next one. Politics is a grimmer thing with them than it is with us. One reason for that, perhaps, is the fact that they have skipped our stage of pure politics — the sham battles of rhetoric which for a generation have passed for politics with us — and have leaped headlong into the pit of economic

struggle. Another reason is that in Mexico the minority has no power.

Those who are disinterested exponents of the present regime and defend its socialistic radicalism stake everything on mass education. Their great weapon is the public school. They insist that the Indian can be shaken from his ancient ways, his stubborn individualism, his fatalistic acceptance of whatever master heaven gives him and, by being taught to read, write and figure, can be made into a civilized man, willing and able to play his part in the collectivism of modern democracy.

Those who have been despoiled of their lands or are being hampered in the practice of business by a steadily more arrogant bureaucracy say this dream can never come true. In support of their pessimism they point to the many Indians who have had enough of "land and liberty" and want to return to the old ways. Admitting the theoretic desirability of mass education, they insist that it must move more slowly than the enthusiasts would have it move.

I talked the other day to an official of the government. He was urbane, charming and persuasive. As he talked the suavity left him and his eyes flashed. Today I talked with a prominent member of the opposition. He was urbane, charming and persuasive, but presently he, too, became violent.

Maybe Mexico can work out a compromise between these hopelessly conflicting points of view. All Mexicans hope it can. Some Mexicans think it can. As an observer I cannot but be dubious. Though, for that matter, I am a little dubious about the United States. Even that enlightened and homogeneous country is going to have a tough time, I think, reaching an amicable solution of the economic differences which

split it now. We have had public schools for nearly five generations, but apparently something more than education is needed to make such a man as Mr. Lewis of the miners see eye to eye with Mr. Sloan of the motors.

If the United States is so far from being one big happy family, it is not hard to understand why Mexico seethes with volcanic rumblings, and why anyone who attempts to prophesy its future is foolish to put his prophecies in writing.

## *Memorable Afternoon*

The greatest stabilizing influence in Mexico is the tourist traffic. Take the case of the Reforma Hotel—the finest establishment of its sort in Mexico and, from the standpoint of architecture, equipment and location, one of the finest in the world. In this magnificent caravanserai it took me twenty minutes to get a chambermaid. I waited nearly an hour for someone to bring me breakfast.

If you will stand for ten minutes in the lobby of the Reforma you will hear more Anglo-Saxon profanity than in any place I know. The air seethes with American anger. You hear one tale after another of incompetence and mismanagement, and you groan inwardly at the unfortunate impression of Mexico these newcomers are getting.

The irony of it all is that the management is not to blame. The fault is the undigested liberty with which the Mexican people are now overloaded.

The present government holds power because of working-class approval. All its sympathies are with labor. The employer and the petty bourgeoisie are for the moment in eclipse. Unionism is strong, and each day new laws are enacted to strengthen the position of the proletariat.

Hours and conditions of work are strictly regulated. There are heavy separation allowances. The person who hires help, be he an individual householder or a hotel manager, is obliged to compromise between abstract notions of efficiency and the all too real power that the employee now wields.

Into this picture comes the tourist, demanding service and

not giving a whoop for the rights and comfort of anybody but himself. If the Mexican hotelkeeper can't fire chambermaids for not answering bells, then the tourist will not come to Mexico. The thing is quite simple. And so, I think, there will presently be a compromise. In order to maintain the flow of tourist gold, a good part of which filters down to proletarian pockets, the Mexican workers will consent to trade a little liberty for a little discipline and efficiency. From a theoretic standpoint this will be unfortunate, but money talks, here as well as elsewhere.

If hospitality has anywhere been raised to a higher point than it attains in Mexico I do not know the address. Sunday we had a taste of Mexican hospitality at its best when we lunched with friends in the country. When one passes the forbidding front door of a Mexican home he becomes one of the family, and when we sat down to the heavily laden board of our host we were made to feel that we were of the establishment.

And what an establishment! The house must date from the time of Cortez, and before the meal we washed our hands in a bowl that was two hundred years old. The house was filled with furniture that would make a collector envious, and in every corner were things worthy of preservation in a museum.

The sun was high when the repast began, and twilight was upon us when we finally gave in. There were soup and strange vegetables with stranger sauces, and a dish to delight the heart of an epicure—*mole de guajolote*—turkey, I believe, drowned in a mixture of peppers and chocolate and sheer genius. This called for a lesson in the use of the tortilla. One tears this thin round cake into quarters, and from them fashions

little scoops with which to catch up the *mole*. One of the guests was expert at this pastime, doing it with one hand, like an old-time westerner rolling a cigarette. I finally gave up and used a spoon.

I am sure I did everything wrong. Mexicans are punctilious about manners and we Americans must seem brusque to them. But nothing was ever said about the mistakes I made, and the nearest thing to a reproach I had was when one of the guests warned me not to drink milk after eating a *chirimoya* — a delicious fruit. He said it made people crazy.

That afternoon was one long to be remembered. Our host and his four children, ranging from seventeen years down, all spoke English and, although his wife unfortunately did not, it was demonstrated once again that warm and friendly hearts get along surprisingly even without a bridge of language between them.

Over the coffee and the *mamey* — another fruit new to me — we talked. Our host was a freethinker as to religion and a liberal as to politics, mistrustful of both communism and fascism, willing to concede the good points of the present Mexican government, but fully alive to its shortcomings. He told tales with an Alice in Wonderland flavor, of property being assessed for improvements to an extent greater than the value of the property, and of the manifold vexations that had to be endured by a businessman in a society that teetered uncertainly between socialism and older ways of life.

His wife was a staunch Catholic, but fully aware of the corrupt ways into which the Mexican church had fallen. She — and the friend who interpreted for her — were on the whole glad that the church had been shorn of its temporal power. The power of religion was not, she said, in buildings

and lands and the riches of this earth. She felt that out of the strife of the past would come a better state and a better church.

Yes, a memorable afternoon, and I regret that more Americans cannot have such an experience. It would give them a better idea of Mexico than they could get from a whole library of guidebooks.

## *The Hand of Fate*

This morning, before shoving off for Puebla, I encountered an American lady just arrived from the north. She was frankly awed by my intention to penetrate what she called "the interior." In her eyes Dr. Livingston could not have been more daring when he buried himself in the Congo. As a matter of fact, the trip from the capital to Puebla is just about the same in distance, danger and arduousness as the trip from Chicago to Milwaukee. The driving is considerably easier. This lady, however, did not know this. All she knew of Mexico was what she had heard. And some of the tales she had heard were horrific.

One was particularly delightful. A friend of hers, a member of the Garden Club, had told of an experience in Cuernavaca. It appears that the ladies of the Garden Club were visiting the Morrow gardens. Suddenly on a nearby *mirador* appeared a creature in a yellow serape. He wore an enormous straw hat tied grotesquely under his swarthy chin, and he made the most awful faces. Truly a dreadful creature, she said. And he kept shouting in the most threatening tones: "Gringo pigs! Gringo pigs!"

Now this story is wholly true. But the dreadful creature in the serape was none other than Lloyd Lewis, American journalist and historian, who was a visitor in an American home next door to the Morrow establishment.

A chair — a most ingenious and comfortable chair — was at the bottom of our visit to Puebla. We first saw it far down

in Acapulco, and all we could learn of its origin was that it had been made by a man in Puebla.

Picturing Puebla as a sun-baked hamlet, we thought that it would be easy to find the chairmaker. Fancy our surprise when we found Puebla to be a city of a hundred and fifty thousand, the third or fourth largest in Mexico and by far the most modern. It is the only city designed by the Spaniards — all the others having been superimposed on native towns. It is therefore Andalusian in architecture, with broad, well paved streets running at right angles to one another and straight as arrows. The people, too, are better dressed — that is, a greater portion of them wear modern costume.

Baffled by all this, we drew up at a curb, wondering what to do next. Immediately a guide appeared, assuring us that he was the best in town, and that he could, among other things, secure us entree to private homes. This was a bad mistake on his part; for nothing in this world is more private than the privacy of a Mexican home. So we returned to our wondering. At that point fate took us by the hand.

Another young man approached, offering his services as guide. His name was Alfonso Martinez, and in desperation we engaged him. This, it turned out, was one of the best moves we ever made, for the young man, a scholar, musician and man-about-town and a Methodist who neither smokes nor drinks, proceeded to make himself invaluable.

He first asked us what we wished to see, and we told him the truth. We confessed our guilty passion for the chair we had seen in Acapulco. He did not smile indulgently or look blank. No! In the excellent English he had learned in the schools of Puebla he said that he would conduct us to the sanitarium of Dr. Quintana, where there was such a chair as we had described. And lo, he was right! The good doctor was

about to leave for a period of study at the Mayo clinic in Minnesota. He wanted American currency. We wanted his chair. Everything was arranged, and convinced now that we had nothing to do but follow Señor Martinez wherever he might lead, we drove out to what was once the great Aztec city of Cholula — site of the decisive battle between the Spaniards and the Indians.

Wherever one looks in this amazing place one sees churches. The guidebooks say there are three hundred and sixty-five — one for every day in the year. This is an exaggeration; there are only two hundred and fifty-two — about one to a family would be my guess.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute this mania for church building to the conquistadors, for all they did was to build churches on existing Aztec shrines and temples. The pyramid merely grew into a church, and the Aztec symbols of the sun and moon were assimilated by the newcomers and became part of the ecclesiastic architecture of New Spain. One thing is certain — if the Franciscans and the Dominicans built more churches than would seem to be necessary they certainly built them well. They brought all the artificial beauty that exists in Mexico today, and no matter how far off the beaten track the visitor may roam, his eye will rest contentedly on a poem in stone, bound with consummate artistry between the covers of cloud and flowing hills.

The years pass, but the folly of men remains. Some day, perhaps, antiquaries will muse over the ruins of American towns and marvel that a people so civilized in other respects should have found it necessary to have so many gas stations.

## *Not the Custom*

I have always had a prejudice against guides. They have a set route and a set patter, and any personal alterations are upsetting. When you take a guide you see what he wants you to see, and you hear whatever he has memorized, including several shopworn jokes.

But, like everything else in Mexico, its guides are different. Most of those I have met are young men of education, and more than one of them has proved to be the scion of a family that once ruled the land now taken over by the tourist. Not every tourist knows the background of the young man he pays so much an hour to show him around, and occasionally one is treated to the droll spectacle of a visitor still at the stage of eating with a knife being patronizing to a guide whose ancestors came over with Cortez.

The Mexican aristocracy has had to swallow a lot of pride in the last couple of decades, and I must say it has done the job gracefully. These people do little repining and philosophically turn their hands to whatever means of livelihood is open.

Criticism of the tourist does not come from the blue bloods who tend bar for him, manage his hotels and steer him around the ruins. The gentleman, reduced by revolution to penury, is a stoic about it, and if in his heart he feels a legitimate contempt for the uncouth barbarians whom fate has made his masters he says nothing. As a matter of fact, he really feels less contempt than tolerant amusement. Amazing as it must seem to a self-satisfied American, the cultivated

Mexican finds us a rather droll lot. As one of them said to me, we are "primitive."

The real contempt for us is felt by the Indians. They are shocked by the way some of us drink, and by the way some of our women dress. Unlike us, they do not change their habits from year to year. They cannot understand what we mean by "fashion." And so when they see an American woman in shorts they are scandalized. It is useless to point out to them that the native women wear décolleté dresses which would create a commotion on an American street.

All one can do is shrug one's shoulders and say, as the French do, "Other lands, other customs."

One Mexican custom that few Americans can understand is the habit of bargaining. If it is not universal it is so nearly so that the exceptions are notable. To an American it is a nuisance. In the opinion of many Mexicans it is one of the chief barriers to the economic progress of the nation, and there are many efforts to establish a system of fixed prices.

So far there is no evidence that these efforts have been successful. When you buy anything from a Mexican you must bargain for it. The Mexican likes to bargain. The play of wits, the practical psychology involved, the variance in results, all conspire to make an amusement out of what would otherwise be a dull routine of trade. How much more fun it is, says the Mexican, to haggle over a price, gaining a little here and losing a little there, exercising all the arts of persuasion, detecting the weak spot in a customer's character, playing upon his cupidity and nursing his folly, than merely to go through the day monotonously ringing up the same transaction over and over.

A friend of mine happened to want a half dozen chairs of a certain sort. One day a native passed his house leading a

burro on which were packed half a dozen chairs of just the sort my friend wanted.

My friend hurried out to the road and halted the merchant. "Go no farther," he said. "You can spare yourself the long walk to the market; for I shall buy all your chairs."

To his surprise, the native shook his head.

Thinking it a question of price, my friend raised his original offer. Still the native shook his head. My friend raised his price a third time, but with no greater success.

Finally, in exasperation and bewilderment (for he had offered a price considerably above the market value of the chairs), my friend demanded to know why the native would not consent to a sale. It was odd, he thought; for he was saving the man the long walk to and from the market and, besides, was offering more money than he could hope to get in the usual way.

The native's explanation was quite simple. "It is not the custom," he said quietly. And with a chirrup to his burro he resumed his plodding course to the market in the valley below.

From the native's point of view that answer was sufficient. What he meant was that if he sold all his chairs at one fell swoop he would be cheated out of a day's pleasant haggling in the market place. He had risen before dawn and walked many miles for that pleasure. It was really rather unkind of my friend to try to buy it away from him.

Small wonder the American finds Mexico hard to understand!

## *Learning to Lose*

Most visitors to the unique city of Puebla spend only an hour or two there. They drive from the capital, arriving about noon. They take a hasty squint at the cathedral — in some respects the most remarkable church in the New World, with an intricacy of carved stonework that fills one with awe for the patience and ingenuity of man; then they rush through the bootleg convent of Santa Monica — of which more anon — and about three, after a quick skip through Cholula's church of the forty-nine domes, they start the drive back to Mexico, D. F. Sometimes they carry box lunches with them — when they might be having *jaibas rellenas* — crabs of great delicacy — cooked by Señora Victoria Gutierrez at the Café Ritz — as good a restaurant as I have found anywhere.

These hit-and-run visitors do not visit the library. They do not even know there is one. There alone one could spend a month. There are gathered no fewer than twenty-four thousand manuscript books, any one of which would be kept under glass in an American museum, and priceless incunabula can be examined more readily than one could examine the tariff sheet in an American railway office.

Our guide was thoroughly at home in this library — the third oldest on the American continent, the first being in Lima, Peru, and the second in Mexico City. The one in Puebla was built in 1648, and the original shelving is still in use. Even the clock is an old-timer, having ticked steadily for one hundred and twenty years.

Time pressed, but it was hard to drag myself away from the marvels laid before my astonished eyes. One in particular was an atlas, printed by Christopher Plantin in 1584, which disclosed some things I had not before known about the United States.

The southern part was mapped in great detail and with considerable accuracy. The northern part was blank, save for two words—"Saguenai," at approximately where Saginaw stands today; and "Chilaga," at about where the Ohio and the Mississippi meet. No rivers, however, were shown. And the great lakes were shown only as an arm of the Arctic ocean. It was explained in the text that all this territory was the land of the Chilaga Indians—could this have any bearing on the origin of the word "Chicago"?

There was another map, no less interesting, showing the missions and settlements in the interior of Africa. From this one must conclude that the Dark Continent was less dark in the sixteenth century than it is today.

There had been hundreds of American tourists in Puebla the preceding week, said the director of the library, and not one had visited his treasure house. And none, I fear, visited the school, built in 1932 in honor of Aquiles Serdan, the first victim of the revolution of 1910.

There are few public schools in the United States to equal this establishment. Here are modern buildings set in a vast acreage of garden and ponds laid out to form a map of Mexico. On the end wall of one of the buildings is a giant map of the state of Puebla, done in colored tile. The study of geography is no chore in this school.

Another place visited by few tourists is the public recreational center, with its swimming pool, gymnasium, theater, dance floor, bandstand and what not—all of the most

modern construction and all free to the populace. Here young Mexico is learning to play—perhaps its most important lesson. Those who know tell me that the awakening interest in sports is the most hopeful thing in Mexico today. These people say that when the Mexican can take a licking without feeling in honor bound to avenge it violently, Mexico will find many of its political problems solved.

There are many people uninterested in churches, but no one can visit the recently (1934) discovered convent of Santa Monica without remembering it always. Here was what was always supposed to be a private home. Then, accidentally, the police discovered a concealed door which led into a convent. More secret passages were revealed, connecting the convent with a church, and probably with other parts of the city. Here, unsuspected by the world, a large number of nuns lived and worked and died, just as their predecessors had done for a century or more.

Today the premises are being used by the government as a sort of ecclesiastical chamber of horrors and museum of the work and practices of the religious orders. Here, again, I could have tarried for many hours, in a mixture of awe at what asceticism can endure, and admiration for the exquisite beauty of the things those prayerful hands turned out. But there was the train for Oaxaca to be caught, not to speak of one quick glance at the battlefield red with the setting sun, where the last of the Aztec bronze melted under the steel of Cortez.

## *Gas-Tank Caps and Cypress*

Racing to catch the train for Oaxaca (which, incidentally, is pronounced "Wawhocca") the taxi ran through a stop light, which brought the law down on us. This involved a delay while the driver talked himself out of a ten peso fine. We might have missed the train if it had not been, as usual, a couple of hours late.

The dim-lit waiting room was crowded with Indians, dozing in their serapes or suckling their young, as the sex might be; but even here there were Americans. One sat down beside me and asked how I liked Mexico. When I told him he said he liked it pretty well, too. Then he said: "Just before I left home I was reading some newspaper articles by a fellow named O'Brien. He. . . ."

There was only one thing to do. I had to interrupt him and reveal the truth. At that he held out his hand. "I don't know how right you are about the rest of Mexico, because I've only seen a little of it. But boy, you certainly were right about the noise of Taxco!"

The train to Oaxaca has what are called Pullmans, and it is true that they were built by the Pullman Company. But the track is narrow gauge, and so are the cars. Furthermore, the berths are in proportion. I am no giant, but there was only an inch or so between the top of my head and the wall of the compartment.

If you ever travel this way, get a compartment if you can. It is worth the extra cost. And if you win the toss, take the

upper berth. It is no downy couch, but it is downier than the lower, which is about as downy as a piece of plank.

And when you can't figure out a way of turning out the light, don't ring for the conductor, as we did, but do the obvious thing and unscrew the bulb — if you can reach it. Some lights have switches and some have not. Do not ask me why.

Though the beds are hard and the roadbed harder, the cars are clean and smell pleasantly of disinfectant. In the morning the berths will be made up in a fraction of the time required for an American berth, and one of the several porters will serve an excellent breakfast, some of which, if you are careful, you can get down your gullet. Do not, however, attempt to pour coffee when rounding a curve.

Waiting for us in the bright morning sun we found Carlos Corres — ex-hacendado, whose estates went the way of so many estates in the revolution. He now gains his daily bread by showing tourists around Oaxaca. And I can state with authority that he knows enough about the very considerable past of that community to satisfy even a schoolmaster. What is more, he is a psychologist with a sense of humor, and he understands tourists as well as he does ruins. That is, he knows just how much ruin any given tourist can take without indigestion, a rare and precious quality in a guide.

It is irrelevant, at this point, to talk about the caps on gas tanks, because there is no road to Oaxaca, and if you come here you will not come by car. But even with the few cars which have come to Oaxaca by freight, the national vice of stealing gas-tank caps is enthusiastically practiced.

When you park a car in Mexico you unscrew the cap of the gas tank and put it in your pocket. You need not worry about the contents of the tank, for the Mexicans are a primitive

people—not as yet at the cultural level of the United States—and have not therefore thought of siphoning off the gasoline.

This constant worry about the whereabouts of my gas-tank cap annoyed me to such an extent that I took up the matter with a high official of the Mexican government. I said something should be done about it. He agreed with me, and, turning to a secretary, directed a letter be dispatched to all state officials and municipalities suggesting that this evil be forthwith stopped.

Then he turned back to me with the grave assurance that no more gas-tank caps would be stolen. I could not but reflect on the comment of one observing Mexican who assured me that the outstanding weakness of the Mexican character was its tendency to accept a thing planned as a thing completed. That, he said, was why one saw so many unfinished buildings in Mexico. And that was why, too, all the altruistic vaporings of the present government would come to nothing.

Maybe so. Today I visited a sight that fills even a Californian with awe—a tree said to be six thousand years old. From time immemorial the Indians have worshiped it as a symbol of life eternal. This giant cypress has heard the altruistic vaporings of countless generations of men and seen them come to nothing. Yet if it could speak, I think it would say that man has made some progress since it was a sapling.

## *Under the Red Flag*

It is the unexpected things that give savor to travel. When we arrived in Oaxaca we found to our dismay that our guide had a party of tourists in tow. With the tendency that every tourist has to look down on other tourists, and disliking the personally conducted tour anyway, we were not pleased. We bowed coldly when we were introduced to the two couples from San Francisco who were to share our visit to Mitla, and resigned ourselves to the worst. Well, they turned out to be most cultivated, amusing, generally agreeable folk; and our journeyings about this region would not have been nearly so pleasurable without them.

Oaxaca is visited for the most part by travelers with a serious purpose. People whose major interests are night clubs and the movies stick close to the capital; and flibbertigibbets like myself, who tire easily of churches and grow quickly saturated with ruins, stick closer to the beaten path. Oaxaca is a long way from the capital; and the ruins of Mitla are a long, dusty, jolting way from Oaxaca.

For the archaeologist and the architect, these buildings constructed of massive stone blocks by a people who did not know the use of the wheel are extraordinarily interesting. Even to such an ignoramus as myself, incapable of distinguishing between Zapotec, Miztec, Toltec and Aztec no matter how many times the differences are explained, these relics of a faraway past, standing alone in the trackless desert, are singularly impressive.

Here the civilization of this continent reached one of its

highest points, only to die and disappear—why, no one knows. I climbed dutifully to the top of what once were majestic temples; and, candle in hand, crawled into what once were tombs. But I think I was most moved when I stood on the remains of a wall, gazing off at a gang of laborers working on a stretch of what is to be the Pan-American highway.

The old was silent, but the new echoed to the clang of pick and shovel. In one year, or two—three, maybe—if the money can be found and if politics will concern itself more with communication and less with definitions of “liberty”—there will be gas stations clustered about the tombs of Mitla and cars will go whizzing by, rolling down to Rio and beyond.

Today you can drive on a paved highway from New York to Tehuacán, where the good road ends in a luxurious modern hotel, all complete with tennis courts and swimming pool. Tomorrow you can push on to Oaxaca and the ruins of Mitla. The next stretch will be to Guatemala. And before the paper on which this prophecy is printed has crumbled into dust there will be good going for the motorist from Canada to Buenos Aires.

Coca-Cola is here already—there is no town so remote as not to have it. And basketball follows close behind. One may travel for days by foot and burro and still come upon Indians amusing themselves with this importation from the north.

The leaders of modern Mexico lay heavy stress on games. They are a substitute for the pulque with which such a large part of the population has long been accustomed to find surcease from woe and boredom. They have—or it is hoped they will have—a valuable psychological effect. When the Mexican people have learned to play games, and to lose without rancor, they will have taken a long step toward political

stability. Hitherto, elections have settled little, for the defeated candidate usually felt in honor bound to resort to homicide.

So it is that you see basketball fields even oftener than you see the hammer and sickle and the intertwined red flags around the slogan, "Viva Marx." Mexico has got communism all mixed up with stout lungs and sturdy biceps; and even the army is busy jumping rope.

Oh, yes, Mexico is very "red." There are signs of that everywhere. Even far out in the desert we stumbled on the remains of a Dominican monastery now used as a school for teachers. Everywhere on its walls were revolutionary paintings filled with the red flag; and on one doorway were chiseled the names of the anarchists convicted, long ago, of the Haymarket riots in Chicago. Lenin glares down at you, cheek by jowl with Zapata and other notable burners of haciendas, indifferent to the incongruous setting for their portraits. Beyond doubt this center of learning is as red as anything in Moscow.

But somehow the redness doesn't seem to reach the Indians. Stubborn fellows, they persist in associating land with liberty; and land, to them, means the private ownership thereof. What the Indian wants is forty acres and a mule — or the Mexican equivalent of that, which is a couple of acres and a burro. That seems to be as far as he has gone toward understanding the "brotherhood of man."

Intellectually, Mexico may be communist; but at least 90 per cent of the population remains about as communist as Iowa. And the present Mexican government has its eyes fixed prayerfully on the 90 per cent.

## *Lo, the Poor Indian*

In the Indian town of Zimatlan, two days by burro from the railroad, and reached by gasoline only because the Mexican has not learned that one should have a heart, even with a motorcar, I am moved to pass on what I have learned about photography for those amateurs who may come to this deceptive land.

In the first place the light is not as bright as it seems to be. The sun is more dazzling to the eye than to film. Wear dark glasses, but open your diaphragm at least twice as wide as you think you should. If you use a light meter take your reading close up to the principal object you wish to photograph. Don't stand off at a distance and take the reading of all outdoors.

Suppose, for example, you want to catch one of the picturesque types with which every Mexican street is filled. He will be on the shady side of the street, because only mad dogs and Americans walk out in the noonday sun. He will thus be in a light at least ten times weaker than the light on the sunny side. Furthermore, his face will probably be shaded by a big sombrero. And lastly, his skin will be the color of chocolate.

So, fellow amateurs — remember the old rule: Expose for the shadows and let the high lights take care of themselves.

Certain economists ask us to believe that the Indian is really happier than the wage worker in our modern industrial system. One can make a fairly good case for this argument, provided one does not see too much of the life that the Indians actually lead.

The fact is that the life of the average Indian is one of extreme physical discomfort. He is subject to all sorts of pestilence, of which malaria and syphilis are outstanding.

In one waterless region the natives subsist almost entirely on the maguey plant—a cactus from which they secure clothing and the thread with which to sew it, materials for their houses, food for their stomachs and pulque with which to quench their thirst. And from the pulque they distill *tequila* and *mescal*, with which they get extremely drunk and forget how essentially miserable is the life of an Indian.

The Indian never knows a bed. He is born, sleeps and dies on a mat called a *petate*. He shivers when it is cold and is wet when it rains. He labors from dawn to dark at a wage as low as fifteen centavos a day—a trifle over four cents. For the straw hat of bright colors that fetches several dollars when it reaches the shops of the north, the Indian who makes it gets five centavos—something over a penny. Nothing in our system of mass production equals the “speedup” under which these Indians live. They weave steadily, even when moving from place to place. They hardly dare stop to eat.

If they are farmers they have to trudge miles to a market to dispose of their produce, getting a few pennies for it if they are lucky, and nothing if they are not. They are free, now, many of them working for themselves. They should therefore be as happy as larks and sing as they turn out beautiful things. I have not observed that they do.

The more I learn about the Indians the more nonsensical appear the ideas I formerly had about them. Consider, for example, their teeth. They seem to have such good teeth. But a man who has lived among them says that their good teeth are in front. The back teeth decay early.

Their character, says this same man, presents a similar

contradiction. They look fierce but are not. They drink too much but are not quarrelsome, even in liquor. They are skeptical of the white man, especially of his love of gold, and among the Yaquis, for instance, to go prospecting is to court suicide. Many of them speak no language but their own, and this, often, is only a spoken language.

They remain wedded to their ancient faith, and even when they are professing Christians the churches they attend show the Aztec symbols of the sun and moon interwoven with the cross. They are chaste, according to their lights, and their moral code is rigorous if simple. And, according to my authority, they are notably honorable. The best qualities in the Mexican character, he says, are those which derive from the Indian strain.

I suppose the next authority I consult will contradict all this. But until I hear a contradiction I am willing to let these observations stand. They coincide with what I have seen for myself.

## *Going Too Far*

I suppose I should say something about the gorgeous view from Monte Alban, for it most certainly *is* gorgeous. I should say something, too, about the famous Tomb Number Seven — the King Tut's tomb of the Western world — whence came the treasure trove of the Alban jewels. But all this is covered in the guidebooks, and anyway I must confess that I am more interested in live Zapotecas than in dead ones — even those who died twenty centuries ago, leaving such interesting ruins behind them.

Not so gay, the life of the 1937 Zapotec. His amusements are few and far between. One game he plays consists of two teams kicking with the bare toes a wooden ball twenty or thirty miles across country. (From the poultry on which I have gnawed I gather that some such game must be played by the chickens.)

The Indian loves music, and it is said that people who can play a band instrument are in danger of being kidnaped. So great is this passion for music that the inhabitants of one small and remote village, none of whom earned over a half peso a day, scraped together two hundred and fifty pesos to bring a band across the mountains for an evening concert.

In the plaza of Oaxaca, the other night, I heard a band that Sousa could not beat. The benches were full of Indians wrapped in their serapes and somberly content.

One of the first things an Indian buys, when he prospers, is a radio. I have yet to visit a community so remote that it does not have one or more loud-speakers constantly in use. It

has been only for few and fleeting moments during my sojourn in Mexico that I have been out of earshot of some radio. One of the significant tales I have heard concerns an industrialist — a printer doing a rather large business. Vexed with constant strikes and steadily increasing taxation, he resolved to quit. It seems that the new laws of Mexico forbid an individual or corporation to liquidate or sell a business. If they want to quit they have to turn over their assets to their workers or to the state. So this man kissed his not inconsiderable property good-bye and took on the sales agency of an American-made radio. He says he is doing as well or better than he did as a printer — with nothing much to lose should the "people" grow more vexatious than they are now.

I hear his story duplicated on all sides. What has happened, I think, is that the socialistic state, in its reaction from the too capitalistic state, has gone too far. If the foreign investor was too greedy, so are the "people." One of these days, not far off, there will be a reaction — and compromise.

Today, at lunch, I heard a tale that any visitor to Mexico must hear with dismal frequency. It was the story of a family which for a dozen generations have been landed proprietors. They paid their laborers well, and besides wages gave them food, clothing, shelter, medical care and schools. They produced much wealth and the community was prosperous. Then came the revolution, with its cry of land and liberty.

Without compensation, the lands of the family were taken away. The machinery of their sugar mills rusted away and was finally sold to the Japanese government as scrap iron. The peasants moved in and took possession. They "own" the land now, but in small units they cannot farm it as profitably as it was farmed before. Production has fallen off. The farmers — some of them — make more than they did before,

but the purchasing power of their money is less. Many of them sigh regretfully for the days that are gone, and mutter of counter-revolution. They are free, they say, but for what?

The landed proprietor with his more or less benevolent feudalism is gone, and the *cacique*, or local boss, has taken his place. The *campesino* remains exploited as he always has been, while a few clever rascals get rich. This is the story you hear everywhere, and I have no doubt that it is largely true.

But it is only part of the story. In some localities the peasants have recognized the economic fallacy of farming in small units and have formed themselves into cooperatives. Their production equals or exceeds the production under the old system. And if they are not notably better off as regards income they have something they never had before — hope. The horizon has widened, and they are no longer content to live and die as beasts of burden. They know as well as anyone that they are not yet at the promised land, but they think they descry it afar off.

One of these days, says the ex-landowner, the sensible people of the country will rise and chase the crooks and the crackpots out. He thinks that Mexico will then return to what is was before Madero. I do not think so. I agree with him that the tide will turn, as it always does, but I am convinced that feudalism is dead forever.

## *Lucky Encounter*

Getting out of Oaxaca is harder than getting in. One of the peculiarities of Mexican hotels is that there is seldom anyone at the desk. There will be bootblacks in profusion, vendors of serapes and basketry, assorted mendicants and a *mozo* or two, but the business department is usually busy elsewhere when you want to do business with it.

This peculiarity is akin to that of the Mexican waiter, who always answers with an enthusiastic "yes! yes!" to whatever order you give him, and then immediately forgets about it. A Mexican restaurant is a place for the development of patience.

Our train was due to leave at seven fifteen this morning. So when we returned to the hotel last night we tried to pay our bill. But finding no one to accept our money we retired to bed, assuming that our affairs could be regulated in the morning.

We had been warned that it would be wise to reach the station well before train time, so we rose at five. The hotel office was even more deserted than it had been the night before and, filled with a consciousness of sin, we stole forth in the darkness, our bill unpaid, to hunt a taxi.

In most American towns the station or depot is at the center of things, since the railroad usually came first and the town grew up around it. The reverse is true in Mexico and the station is usually in a suburb. So, what with finding breakfast and a cab and the distance we had to ride, it was six thirty before we reached the station. The more experienced natives were already there and we had to content ourselves with seats

on the sunny side—which, should you ever take this ride (and I hope you never do!) is on the right, A.M., left P.M.

There were three cars to the train—two second-class, in which the common people were stuffed like sardines, and one first-class, for tourists and the more prosperous Mexicans. The chief difference was in the leather padding of the first-class seats.

Our train was well staffed. There were two conductors—one, apparently, to take the tickets, and the other to watch him; an auditor, whose function it was to watch both conductors; a brakeman; a train butcher, who sold magazines and cigarettes; a sweeper-up, who cleaned out the car at every important stop; and eight soldiers, who munched sugar cane and looked extremely bored with their assignment.

The railway unions are among the strongest in Mexico, with the highest scale of wages. It is not hard to understand why Mexican railway bonds do not reflect the increasing prosperity of the country. A considerable part of every ticket goes to the help.

An interesting commentary on life in Mexico was supplied by one of the two conductors. He had a small satchel for his belongings, and when the train started he brought out a chain and padlock, with which he fastened his bag to one of the seats. Mexicans, I observe, do not trust one another very much.

The rickety little train crawled joltingly along its narrow-gauge track, and as the sun rose high the car grew hotter and the seats grew harder. It looked as if it would be a long day. The scenery ceased to awe and there was a certain sameness about the quaint native life of the many stations. Fortunately, however, we found an extraordinary traveling companion in the person of Eugene Nida, a young American philologist who was in the employ of the Mexican government, making a

study of the languages of the Indians. He had lived in remote places and knew more about the life of the native than anyone thus far encountered.

From him I learned anew how absurd it is for anyone to claim a knowledge of Mexico. For one thing, there is as yet no such thing as "Mexico." The idea of national unity is only just beginning to dawn. The people are still divided into countless groups, racial and linguistic, with roots in localities rather than in anything that can be called a nation.

Significant among the tales he told was one about a Mexican philologist who at a meeting of scholars made a speech in Aztec about his ancestors. One by one he resurrected forgotten glories. The only hero he did not mention was the only one that most of us have ever heard of — Montezuma. This one he did not mention because Montezuma, he said, had made the mistake, never to be forgiven, of trusting the white man.

There, my friends, is a clew to the depths of the problems that Mexico faces in her efforts to become a nation in our sense of the word. To this day the Indian does not trust the white man, and from the Indian the white man derives all his strength, economic and political.

So we talked and dozed and ate countless bananas, and finally saw the sun sink slowly behind the mountains. The cars emptied and the soldiers yawned less frequently. And a little after nine the train came jerkily to rest in the dim-lit station of Puebla — thirteen hours to go two hundred and fifty miles. It would have been a long trip but for Eugene Nida.

## *Crime and Punishment*

Time, they say, means nothing to a Mexican. Maybe so, but after some weeks of residence in the land of *mañana* I am compelled to record that all the Mexicans I have known have been notably prompt in keeping appointments. Our young guide, Alfonso Martinez, was no exception to this rule, and we had no sooner finished our papayas and *cafe con leche* than he was at our hotel door, as eager as a setter after quail.

I had to be firm with him about churches. Conceding the variety, historic interest and beauty of the ecclesiastical edifices he had to show, I insisted that my interest was strongest on the modern side. So, after compromising by a second visit to the sacristy of Santo Domingo and another awed glance at its exquisite stonework, I let him give me a busman's holiday in the shape of a call on the local newspaper editor, who interviewed me on my impressions of Puebla.

From there we went to the penitentiary — as astonishing a place as I have seen in this land of surprises. The exterior was forbidding enough, but the sunlit court inside was charming. It was filled with prisoners, all busy at some kind of work. Some were knitting, some making pottery, some carving, some tilling little gardens. The warden explained that the products they turned out were taken away by relatives and sold.

He suggested that we make some purchases ourselves — a sweater, for example, handmade, could be had for only three pesos — considerably less than a dollar. We had no need for a sweater, but his suggestion brought forth the interesting fact

that the passion for labor unions which has swept over Mexico has not been halted by prison walls. The prisoners in the penitentiaries have their own syndicates, established to regulate the conditions of labor and, above all, to keep prices up.

Another Mexican passion — that for education — has also entered the prisons. There is compulsory schooling for the inmates and, in the opinion of the management, many prisoners go out better men than they came in.

There was little about this jail to remind one of similar institutions in the United States. The prisoners seemed to come and go as they chose, though a guard explained that they were locked in their cells after dark. This was the official locking. During the day the cells were kept locked by the prisoners themselves. Each cell had its private padlock, not furnished by the government. Apparently the prisoners did not wholly trust one another.

Mexicans, it seems, commit the same crimes that other peoples commit. But their criminality is peculiar in this respect: Their crimes of violence are usually impulsive — premeditated murder, for example, is less frequent than it is among people of colder blood, and thievery is for the most part small scale. The Mexican does not go in much for organized robbery.

One hears much about Mexican banditry, and the presence of soldiers on railway trains and armed patrols on the highways gives color to this legend. But I grow convinced that it is largely legend. If comparative figures were available I think they would show life and property as safer in any Mexican community than in large American cities.

Under the influence of marijuana or pulque the Mexican may take to knife or gun. But the government is strict in its repression of the drug traffic, and the pulque shops have also

felt the heavy hand of the law. The Mexican still drinks more than is good for him, but he is supposed to do it on his own premises.

Whether or not drunkenness has been reduced I do not know. The optimists say it has. All I can say is that I have seen comparatively few examples of it, and, with the one exception of a fellow in Tepotzlán, who squealed and made faces at me, the drunks I have seen have been suddenly peaceable. The Mexican, from what I have seen of him, drinks to forget—not to make whoopee.

The government is trying to make all sorts of changes in the Mexican way of life. Not content with its efforts to reduce drinking and to encourage the use of the shower bath, it has been endeavoring for some time to abolish the practice of shaking hands. Sophisticated Mexicans no longer take off their hats, as they once did, but the handshaking goes on, despite the official *pronunciamientos* as to its insanitary character.

In Mexico, as everywhere else on this curious planet, reasonableness and practicality shatter themselves vainly against the iron phrase—"No es costumbre." Here, as elsewhere, the fire of improvement burns itself out on the cold shell of "It isn't done."

Mexico is not changing nearly as fast as the planners and the visionaries would like to have it. But it is changing—and much more rapidly than the conservatives want it to. It is certainly going places—but where is anybody's guess.

## *Happy Landing*

When a Mexican gets behind the wheel of a motorcar something happens—either to him or on account of him. He seems to imagine himself a vaquero of the old school, with a half-broken mustang beneath him. He is calm enough on the straightaway in open country. But let him reach a crowded street, or, better still, the curves of a mountain road, and then he is *muy hombre* indeed!

One should not reason too generally from the particular, but on the ninety miles from Puebla this afternoon I saw two cars go off the road. And that is not a road that one can go off of with impunity.

I must add, however, that, despite the chance-taking propensities of the Mexican motorist, these two were the only accidents I have seen. Like so many things in Mexico, the comparative infrequency of crashes is a mystery.

I hesitate at revealing the name of our hotel in Mexico City. It is such a pleasant hotel, and the Mexicans who patronize it are so inexpensively comfortable. If I tell about it Americans may come more frequently than they do now. Its prices will go up. The cheerful *mozo* who now handles the bags and fetches cigarettes will be put in brass buttons. There will be a doorman and probably an elevator, and a marimba band to prevent conversation at meals.

Meanwhile, it is an oasis for those who like comfort and courtesy and, yes, efficiency—messages are delivered more

promptly than in some establishments I know at home. Like so many things in Mexico, it has a story. The story begins with Francisco Puga, a man of what I should guess was considerable wealth. He had a large family and owned several homes, one of which bore the aristocratic address of Napolis No. 9.

The social upheaval through which Mexico is passing has been hard on men of wealth. So, two years ago, Señor Puga turned his mansion into a hotel — the Casa Real. And having been a good man of business, he is now what I consider one of the best hotelkeepers in all Mexico!

His sons, Miguel, who is thirty-seven, and Luis, the Joseph of the brethren, who is only twenty-one, keep the desk and do everything the *mozo* doesn't do. They speak English with an Oxford accent and have the manners of their hidalgo forebears. It is an experience to have your taxi fetched by a gentleman who, before the revolution, probably never laced his own boots.

My sombrero is off to these Mexican aristocrats. Without complaining or repining, they have fallen into step with the new order. If these words of mine bring a customer or two I shall feel that I have partly discharged the debt I owe them for their hospitality. What is more, I shall be doing a kindness to the customers. Though let me add a warning: If you want lights, swank and lots of cracked ice, better go to some other hotel.

But whatever you do, don't go to Mexico City without hotel reservations of some kind. That warning can't be repeated too often or too emphatically.

Once settled in a hotel, your first port of call in this city will almost certainly be Sanborn's. This is where all Americans go, sooner or later, and many of them never go anywhere else.

It is, first of all, an enormous restaurant, in a historic and beautiful building, where good American food is served at reasonable prices and regular Mexican speed. Here is a good place to begin your education in the art of waiting. After waiting for your lunch on a crowded day in Sanborn's and, having got it, waited for the check, all ordinary waits thereafter will seem like nothing.

But Sanborn's is more than a restaurant. It is a drugstore, an emporium of silver, serapes, basketwork and curios of all kinds, a bureau of information, and a place to meet your friends. To the left of the door as you go in there is a counter behind which stands one of the institutions of Mexico City — Toni Tripis, a young woman who knows everything and seems never too tired to tell it. Toni will tell you where to get anything from postage stamps to tickets for the bullfight.

Across the narrow street which runs past Sanborn's and on whose sidewalks is always a throng of Americans besieged by bootblacks, guides and vendors of gardenias, is a place that few Americans see and still fewer visit. It is a little church set back from the street. Twilight was settling as I drifted in, and the figures I passed were only shadows in the ancient courtyard. Taxis hooted gaily as they raced past. Tourists jostled one another, telling in loud voices of their visit to the pyramids or when they were driving to Taxco. Through the rusted iron fence one could see them as they passed on their way in little groups to have *crepes suzettes* at Paolo's around the corner.

In the little church it was dark and quite still. The only light was from the candles twinkling on the altar. People came in, knelt a minute or two with heads bowed, and went out again. Women, mostly, with shawls over their heads, but men, too — and some of them young.

It was noisy on the street outside. Inside the church, where came those whose hearts were heavy laden, there was no sound. The customers in Sanborn's were waiting for their dinners. These silent figures were also waiting — who knows for what?

## *Social Security*

This evening we sat in the quiet patio of a friend, talking about Mexico. As a veteran of two months I was explaining things to a couple of greenhorns who had been here only a few days. They were filled with forebodings about Mexico. They had been told that it was a land of violence, where no one was safe on the streets and where, if one traveled, one must have guards and artillery. I felt it my duty to disabuse them of this nonsense, and I was just on the point of succeeding when the still night air was rent by a peculiar sound just outside the house.

It was one of those sounds that demonstrate how close joy and pain are to each other. It was impossible to say whether it was laughter or a scream. The only certainty was that it came from a woman.

We waited. For a moment there was silence. And then came what were unquestionably sobs. Without further delay we rushed to the door. There we found a woman, an American who has lived here for many years. An urchin, she cried tearfully, had tried to snatch her purse.

I am afraid that the people to whom I had been explaining the peacefulness of Mexico no longer had confidence in me. Their faces had the look that one sees on the faces of Englishmen when you try to tell them that bandits do not stalk the streets of Chicago.

I think I had better be leaving Mexico. Layer by layer I have labored to get at the truth behind its contradictions, and

there are moments when I fancy that I am beginning to succeed. That is a sure sign that I ought to be studying the maps, preparatory to departure. When one acquires the delusion that he understands a foreign land he should be on his way out of it.

One thing, however, does seem reasonably clear: Labor is in the saddle and riding high, wide and handsome. I have heard the story so often that I can no longer doubt its truth. Variations on this theme come to me, from the householder enjoying the services of a single domestic, to the employer of thousands.

Mexico has clasped the principle of social security to her breast — and is in some danger of squeezing the life out of it. She saw that the fear of losing a job was one of the greatest afflictions in modern life. So with laws and statutes she set about putting an end to this fear.

In Mexico you don't turn the help out when you feel like it. Even if an employee is incompetent or dishonest you have quite a time firing him. You have first to go before a labor court and prove your charges. This is often difficult, especially when the judges you have to convince are already convinced that you are an oppressor of the poor and richer than you ought to be.

The employer who discharges an employee must not only prove good grounds for the dismissal but he must pay a handsome separation allowance, which is based on tenure of service and may run into important money. The proprietor of a restaurant whose food is notably good and whose service is notably bad assured me with a shrug of the shoulders that he had to employ whatever waiters the syndicate, or union, chose to send him, and that to fire a bungler cost him, on the average, about a thousand dollars.

Efficiency goes by the board, and the man who is accustomed to running his house or his business has to grit his teeth and let the help more or less run him. He blames Cárdenas for encouraging the unions in their unreasonable demands. He blames Ambassador Daniels for encouraging Cárdenas. He blames Roosevelt for encouraging Daniels. The only person he seems never to think of blaming is himself.

Yet it is quite clear that what is going on is a reaction. The employer, as a class, always squeezed what he could out of labor and tossed the rind on the scrap heap. He worked labor as hard as he could and paid it as little as it would take. Its health, mental attitude and safety were of concern to him only in so far as they showed a profit on his ledgers.

The only training in economics or social morality that labor ever got, it got from its employers. It was a long, hard course, but labor learned its lesson only too well. When fate put the whip into its hand it proceeded to crack it. The employers had always taken what they could out of labor. Now labor is proceeding to take all it can out of the employers. It is making precisely the same mistakes. It is just as indifferent to considerations of fair play, just as deaf to the pleas of abstract justice, just as blind to its own eventual self-interest.

In due course there will be another reaction. The golden goose of prosperity cannot endure too much choking. If production falls off the worker will be the first to feel it. He may turn against the leaders of labor and follow new gods. The possibility of something like fascism is anything but remote. On the other hand, there are signs of understanding that, if labor apes the follies of the employers, it will meet the employers' fate.

Meanwhile, it is no fun trying to run a business in Mexico.

## *Assorted Vexation*

When you take a taxi in Mexico City you tell the driver where you want to go and add the word "*tostón*" in a hopeful, ingratiating tone of voice. The driver is supposed to answer yes or no. If he says yes, it means that the fare will be fifty centavos — unless, at the end of the journey, he forgets that he said yes. If he says no, it means that the fare will be one peso. If, as happens oftenest, he says nothing, it means that you are likely to have a row when it comes time for settlement.

These arguments are peculiarly unsatisfactory. Filled with righteous anger you may call a policeman, but all he can tell you is that one peso is the legal fare, and any discount therefrom is a matter of arrangement between passenger and driver. If the driver chooses to deny that a half-fare arrangement has been made, there is nothing to do but pay the fare allowed by law.

The situation grows more exasperating each day, as more taxi drivers learn how easy it is to soak the unsuspecting American. In most cases the latter does not even know about this *tostón* business.

Another cause of vexation here is the existence of two telephone systems. The first one was the Mexican, financed by American capital. Then the Ericson Company, a Swedish corporation, entered the field. Today they operate side by side. Business houses subscribe to the two systems. Individuals use the one their friends use. Hotels use the two systems, but usually have the rooms connected to only one.

Thus, if you have a Mexican phone in your room and someone calls you by Ericson you have to go down to the office to answer.

The situation is, of course, ridiculous, and nobody knows it better than the telephone companies. For a long time they have been trying to consolidate, but the government won't let them. That is, the government won't permit the only sort of consolidation that the companies consider sensible. They want to merge the two systems and cut out duplicating overhead. The government insists that this would constitute monopoly, and demands that the two systems establish a third system whose function it would be to connect Mexican subscribers with Ericson numbers, and vice versa.

Matters are temporarily at a standstill, with the government assessing a heavy penalty for each day's failure to provide the kind of consolidation the government wants, and the companies fighting in the courts for their sort of consolidation.

Even without the telephone to contend with, the transaction of business in Mexico City calls for nice management of time. Nobody arrives at his office much before ten.

At one o'clock everything closes and does not reopen until three thirty. Most establishments remain open until eight, or even later.

At first you chafe under the exactions of this schedule, but after a time you follow the native habit of a long and leisurely lunch, with just a snack in the evening. You find that this program is a desirable one when you are living at an altitude of close to two miles.

I have become accustomed to Mexican working hours, but I shall never become accustomed to Mexican money. I doubt if even the Mexicans can do that. The problem of making change is a serious one. I have seen even large establishments

collapse before a five-peso note, and in small shops it is often impossible to get change for even a single peso.

One reason for this situation is the government's habit of calling in from time to time coins it no longer likes, without first providing for their replacement. As I write, the rumor is abroad that after a certain date one of the coins now in use will cease to be legal tender. The thrifty are losing no time in converting this coin into more dependable currency, thus adding to the existing shortage of small change.

A further cause of trouble is the structure of the coins themselves. Some are hard to tell apart, and on some the value is hard to determine, even with a magnifying glass. The peso alone admits of no confusion. With a dozen of them in your pocket you walk like a man with arthritis.

While I am on this subject of vexations I might mention boiled eggs. I like them boiled four minutes. Allowing for the altitude I have ordered them boiled five minutes, then six, eight, ten and, in one moment of frenzy, I begged the waitress to boil them until I came around the next morning. It is no use. They always come in a state just bordering on liquefaction. I have finally solved the problem by ordering omelets.

## *Wise Old Owl*

A man oddly plagued is Josephus Daniels. He first became the butt of caricaturists when, as secretary of the navy, he instructed the commanders of our ships of war to use "right" and "left" instead of "starboard" and "port." The nation guffawed at this order but it is said that the order was issued at the request of naval commanders themselves.

Again he was target for abuse when he forbade the use of liquor on warships — another innovation sponsored by the navy.

Even when he assumed his present post as ambassador to Mexico his fate pursued him. The Mexicans greeted him coolly, for it had been under his orders that the landing at Vera Cruz had taken place.

Today he is extremely popular among such folk as laborers and peasants and all those who favor the social revolution. He is not popular with men of business, social leaders, the clergy and those who in general do not favor the social revolution. The latter classes seem to be of two opinions. One is that Mr. Daniels has instigated all the wicked things that Cárdenas and his gang have done. The other is that he is a kindly simpleton, the dupe of men whose evil intent he has not the wit to understand.

I have not known him long or intimately, so I shall not attempt to say which of these conflicting opinions is the right one. I shall merely set down my impressions.

First off, I shall say, without fear of contradiction, that the

United States embassy in Mexico City is something for Americans to be proud of. It is housed in buildings that are architecturally satisfying, and the furnishing, the decoration and the atmosphere are the epitome of dignity and charm.

There is no swank about the embassy. Servants are few and unobtrusive. Tea is served simply, and the chatelaine of the establishment, Mrs. Daniels, manages to convey the impression that the visitor, whatever his rank or fortune or place in the world, is truly welcome. She is at once the lady playing the part of hostess in her own home with grace and distinction, and the custodian of public property.

She and her husband, the ambassador, are what you might call "folksy" people. Once, when some ladies of social eminence were in doubt as to how she should be addressed, she came to their rescue with a laughing, "Why, I'm just Mrs. Daniels—the same old fool I always was."

Make no mistake, there is nothing crude about the ambassador and his wife. They are gentlefolk, accustomed to meeting the great of this earth on equal footing. But neither is there anything about them that suggests the word "diplomat." Mr. Daniels is not in the Metternich-Talleyrand tradition. He is the sort of person I imagine Jefferson and Ben Franklin to have been.

Make no mistake, either, about our ambassador to Mexico being a benevolent old geezer who takes what is fed him and doesn't know what it is all about. It is my opinion, based on conversations with him and, much more, on the conversations I have had with others about him, that he has the low-down on Mexico as well as any American can hope to have it.

He has looked on the Mexican kaleidoscope with a shrewdly quizzical eye, and he has kept his ears open. It may be that I think him a wise old owl because he has reached

the same conclusions that I have. Whatever the reasons for my thought, I think we would be fortunate if we could always have ambassadors of his sort. He may make blunders, and I have no doubt that he has made plenty in the past. But, large and by, he strikes me as a public servant upon whose service the taxpayers are to be congratulated. From all I can gather, the interests of the United States in Mexico are safe in the hands of that soft-spoken old politician, Josephus Daniels.

He may be the fuddy-duddy his enemies say he is. He may have had the wool pulled over his eyes by the Mexican reds, as is claimed. He may be unsympathetic to greedy wealth, as no one can deny that he is. But I like his slant on things. I like his indiscreet candor. I like his tolerance. Perhaps it is because, as my wife says, I always fall for important people who don't seem to fall pompously for themselves.

## *Paint and Propaganda*

Every tourist has to see the frescoes of Rivera and Orozco, so this morning I set out to do my duty. On the way I dropped in for a look at the opera house, and there I had a surprise. The outside of that vast and imposing building is blatant. Its white marble shrieks to the world that here was to be a structure that even the passer-by would know was expensive. It is new-rich and vulgar. But beyond its great bronze doors one finds an interior (recently finished) that is modern but not "modernistic," rich yet simple, striking yet restrained. In my opinion, the world has few public buildings that can challenge it.

Aside from the main theater this great structure houses numerous lecture and recital halls and vast galleries for the display of paintings. Upstairs, rather badly placed, are two huge murals, one by Rivera, the other by Orozco. The former is a realistic depiction of modern life by a painter who doesn't think much of it. The latter is an allegorical castigation of war, done in howling greens and reds, by a painter with a profound distaste for war.

I do not quite understand why the works of these serious and highly purposeful radicals have come to be one of the main attractions for the tourist. They are skillfully executed, of course, but they are cruelly critical of the economic system by which most tourists live. This was understood by the management of the Reforma Hotel, which followed the example of Mr. Rockefeller and had the fresco it had ordered from Rivera painted out.

Some say that this action was merely a publicity stunt. My own opinion is that the management was right in feeling that a picture showing repulsively jowled men hanging to a stock ticker, with their arms around scantily draped females leering lewdly over champagne glasses, was hardly suitable for a hostelry patronized by affluent Americans.

The fact is that these Mexican painters are not painting for affluent Americans. They are painting for poor Mexicans, and they mix dynamite with their pigments.

The art of painting has had a rebirth in Mexico. The painter no longer lives by the favor of the rich connoisseur. He is supported by the taxpayer. His audience is no longer limited to the few who can afford to hang pictures on their walls. Interest in painting is not confined to critics, dealers, collectors and teachers of art. It is practically universal. The pictures that the modern Mexican paints are not in museums or private homes. They are on — or, more properly, in — the walls of schools, jails, courthouses and public buildings generally.

It used to be assumed that the common herd could not appreciate art. One had to have a guide when he visited an art gallery, and the ordinary person was afraid to have opinions in a field which, by common consent, was limited to the cultivated few. It is a different story in Mexico now. One needs no assistance in "understanding" the murals that the Mexican painters have been turning out. One may or may not "like" them. They may or may not be what the previous generation meant when it looked down its nose and talked about "art." But a child of six can get their meaning.

In the ministry of education, for example, is a mile or more of wall covered with frescoes all depicting the history and the current life of Mexico. Like all history, this has the basis of

the historian. It has more than a flavor of Karl Marx. The painter-propagandists are anything but abstract. They are not interested in quiet landscapes or pictures of sheep huddling against a storm. They are preachers exhorting the common man to know where he is and whence he came. They are revivalists haranguing a populace which cannot read or even understand their spoken words. The extent and profundity of their influence is apparent even to the most superficial observer. And I shall venture to predict that their influence will one day be felt even in the most economically tranquil regions of the United States. They have learned the technique of advertising, refined it, and made it one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of politics.

Coming home from my day with the murals I had a demonstration of the extent to which "local economy" is practiced in Mexico. Driving in the neighborhood of "auto row" I was suddenly besieged by a horde of itinerant repair men, who had observed that my tail light was loose.

Each carried a kit of hammers and wrenches and was prepared to begin operations at whatever point in the crowded street I might care to stop. Apparently there was no job too extensive for these fellows to undertake, and apparently neither the police nor the regular service stations had any objections. It was just another instance of the old and the new living contentedly side by side. There is the one-price store on the avenue for those who prefer it, and near by is the market for those who like to spend a morning in chaffer over centavos. You can have your car lubricated in a modern greasing palace, or for a few pennies a ragged but independent urchin will do the job for you. Mexico is all things to all men.

## *Schoolmaster*

Getting to see Leon Trotzky was the hardest job I have had. His secretary, Bernard Wolfe (Yale, 1935), was pleasant but firm. Mr. Trotzky was too busy to grant idle interviews. What did I wish to see the exile about?

I replied that I did not wish to see him about anything. I merely wished to see him. I had seen the pyramids, the ancient tree at Oaxaca and the thieves' market. To complete my tour I wished to see Mr. Trotzky and compare notes with him on Mexico, to which we were both strangers.

Mr. Wolfe said that the only subject Mr. Trotzky would discuss was the Russian trials. I said that I was unfamiliar with the trials. Mr. Wolfe then suggested that I submit a written list of questions about Russia. Mr. Trotzky, if he saw fit, would answer them in writing, and I could publish them just as written.

To this I observed that what Mr. Trotzky seemed to be after was free publicity, and Mr. Wolfe agreed, adding that when a man was fighting for his life he had to make every word count.

This sort of thing went on for days, and under some difficulties, since the Trotzky house was on the Ericson telephone system and I worked through the Mexican.

Finally I gave in and submitted a list of questions. I asked him for a statement of his case; what he thought of Stalin (having a pretty good idea of what the answer to that one would be); whether Russia was heading back to capitalism;

what he thought of the outlook in Mexico; and whether Walter Duranty was a reliable commentator on things Russian.

The next day Mr. Wolfe called me and said that I could see Mr. Trotzky at five o'clock. So out I went to 127 London street, in the suburb of Coyoacán, and gave my name to the sergeant in command of the dozen policemen lounging at the front door.

Mr. Wolfe was waiting for me with answers to my questions dictated by Mr. Trotzky. Glancing over them I learned that my idea of what he thought about Stalin was correct; that Russia, after it had overthrown its present reactionary bureaucracy, would be more communist than ever; that Mexico was a charming place and its government admirable; and that Duranty was not as dependable a correspondent as the late John Reed. Having read this and been warned not to smoke in the presence of Mr. Trotzky, I was conducted through the patio and into the workroom of the man who has shaken the world as few men have shaken it.

Trotzky rose from the long table covered with books and manuscript, and with stiff courtesy took my hand. He was, he said, at my disposition. He spoke in a strongly accented but astonishingly accurate English. I asked him if he had learned the language during his residence in New York. He smiled at that. "I was only there two months," he said, "and I saw only Russians. I learned what little English I know out of books." He pointed to some books on his table. "I am now learning Spanish," he said.

While we talked I made mental notes on his personality, which is baffling. Of medium height, with the graying hair and beard proper to his fifty-seven years, he does not impress you with the forcefulness that is indisputably his. At first he made me think of an old German shoemaker I had known as

a boy. There was a benevolent twinkle in the eyes that looked at me through spectacles, and when his lips parted in a smile I thought, somehow, of Santa Claus. I remembered what I had read of the singular charm that the man had had for so many people, and for a moment I was ready to join those who ridicule the unpleasant charges made against him.

Then, as he talked, something of his benevolent exterior faded away and I had an inward shiver at the cold, implacable character I felt underneath it. This, I said to myself, was not a man I would care to have against me.

He spoke freely, politely and with seeming candor. But I sensed an arrogance beneath his professions of humility. He was a schoolmaster talking down to a young and rather dull pupil. His speech was precise, almost pedantic, and he made me feel that my questions were no less trivial and ignorant than I was myself. There were moments of panic when I wanted to raise my hand and cry, "Unprepared!"

We chatted then about his personal safety, his travels in Mexico and his methods of work. At no time did he direct the conversation. He answered my leads, but volunteered none himself. When I rose to leave his relief was obvious.

I went away feeling like a schoolboy who has flunked an examination. Certainly I knew no more about this sphinxlike man than I had known before. Is he a scholar devoted to quiet meditation and the writing of books? Or is he a spider weaving a vast and tangled web of discord? Is he, as he says, through with active part in revolutions, or is Mexico — as so many of its people fear — going to rue the day when it granted refuge to this intellectual tornado?

You can answer these questions as well as I can.

## *Dividing the Land*

Comes a letter complaining fretfully that I have not sufficiently discussed the Mexican climate. Dear me, and I thought I had mentioned it at least once a day!

It is, to confine myself to a single word, matchless! In the winter it rains infrequently and then only for a short time and lightly. For the two months of my acquaintance with the country the sun has never ceased to shine, except for its occasional siestas behind the never absent clouds.

It has been uniformly warm and in the middle of the day, hot. In Mexico City there is sometimes enough nip in the air for thin blooded people to welcome a topcoat. For my part I have found white linen more frequently desirable. Incidentally, the Mexicans of the towns do not go in much for white clothing. The reason, I am told, is that they do not wish to be confused with the Indian peasants, with whom white is almost a uniform.

Another notable feature of the Mexican climate is the absence of wind. I am informed that the season of dust storms is now approaching, and it is true that of late Popocatepetl (accent on the *fourth* syllable, please) has been hidden from view. But the air still remains remarkably still.

So, travelers, bring a topcoat if you chill easily, and furs and woolen undies for insurance. Not all winters, I am told, are as mild as this one has been.

Another letter complains that I have not done justice to the land question.

Well, one would have to be here a long time and know the language very well before he could even begin to understand that extremely complicated question. In general the situation is this: The land was originally granted to individuals and to the church under such loose specification of boundaries as "the area that could be seen on a clear day from a given hilltop." The extent of these private domains can well be imagined.

Eventually the peasants revolted, killed or drove away the landowners and divided the land among themselves. Then they discovered that land without tools or money for seed was not what they had expected it to be. So, gradually, they gave it back to the returning owners and resignedly resumed their original state of peonage.

The present revolutionary government is again dividing the land among the peasants, but this time has established a bank which extends credit to the farmer and also aids him in the practice of scientific agriculture.

Certain weaknesses have already appeared in this plan, and to a certain extent have been corrected. In the first place, the distribution of land is in the hands of the local political boss. Obviously the faithful get the best lands, and no less obviously the political boss tends to take the place of the dispossessed *haciendado*. The peasant merely changes masters, having a little more theoretic freedom and a little less practical well-being.

This is the situation at its worst and should not be taken as typical. Even, however, where the distribution of land has been accomplished honestly and efficiently, the peasants discover that individual units of five acres and a mule are not, in the aggregate, as profitable as the great mass production units they have replaced. In sugar and cotton, for example, the big plant is more efficient than a group of small ones.

This truth has now been recognized, and producer co-operation has made its appearance. The great hacienda is reappearing, but this time owned by those who till it and financed by the government land banks.

All this sounds suspiciously like communism. Certainly it is socialistic and, to use another word horrifying to American ears, collective. But from all I can learn the Mexican farmer remains stubbornly individualistic. To him the words "land" and "liberty" are interchangeable. He wants a parcel of land for himself and he wants to be his own boss. He concedes the necessity of tractors and other machinery, and to get them he is willing to cooperate with his neighbors and with the federal government. The suggestion, however, that he exchange his old condition of peonage under the land barons for a new one under the state gets no enthusiastic response from him. A revolution that merely results in a change of masters is not his idea of revolution.

I hear tales of farmers so disgusted with their new freedom that they beg for a return to the old feudal paternalism. I have no doubt that these tales are true. But I also hear tales of farmers with radios in their homes, automobiles in their garages and children in school. And I have no doubt that these tales are true, too.

It is hardly surprising that Mexico has not yet achieved economic democracy; for it has not yet achieved political democracy. But that it is definitely on the march toward both is hardly to be denied. That it may stumble and, perhaps, retrace its steps, is not to be denied either. Meanwhile, Americans will do well to look upon Mexico as casting the shadow of their own future.

## *No Illusions*

I was warned that Diego Rivera (hereabouts one gives a "b" sound to the "v") was a temperamental fellow, and that if I bored or offended him he would unceremoniously give me the gate. I was told, too, that he was a poseur—a mountebank who professed communism but whose pockets were well stuffed with pesos. His communism, these people said, was just another implement in his campaign for personal publicity.

Rivera himself displayed no great anxiety to make my acquaintance. However, he consented to meet me in the office of his agent, Señor Misrachi, a Greek who is Mexico's leading bookseller.

I was hardly prepared for the reality of the man. His hair had not recently seen a comb, his old tweed suit was unpressed, and the faded blue shirt with zipper fastening was open at the throat. On his feet were heavy work shoes, unshined.

The first impression he gives is of a big man, physically. He has a chest like a barrel and his fist is the size of a polo ball. The great bulk of his body made the chair into which he sank seem ridiculously inadequate. But presently, as he talked, one became aware of a mental magnitude to correspond.

Always with a whimsical little smile playing about his lips, always in a spirit of half-humorous detachment, he talked of many things. A well educated man, in the sense of having good schooling behind him, the variety and exactness of his information leave one agape. When his talk took him into American history I found him more familiar with the life of

Thomas Jefferson, for example, than are most Americans. It was easy to understand why his murals amaze specialists with their technical accuracy. Whatever his theme he knows whereof he paints.

As I listened to him, occasionally intruding with a question, it became clear to me that here was no wild-eyed dreamer, no mere rider of an economic hobby. Here, instead, was a highly civilized man, with a better idea of what modern life was all about than most of those who bob about like corks on the turbulent stream of current events.

Rivera has read and traveled and seen the lives of the poor at close hand. He has been in Russia, an active participant in the communist experiment. He is a communist now. But his opinions do not blind him to realities. In Russia, he says, the fires of revolution have cooled and reaction has set in. In Mexico, too, there will be the same inevitable turn of the wheel, and men like himself, their work done, will find themselves out of popular favor, as now they are so much in it.

He has convictions but no illusions. "The communists and socialists and radicals generally in the United States," he said, "have no sense of reality. They do not influence the average American because they do not understand him. They argue among themselves over dogmas wholly remote from the American scene, while the real course of the American revolution proceeds along channels they hardly know are there."

He smiled when I asked him if he thought there would be a revolution in the United States. "It is already well under way," he said. "I have an idea that while Russia and Mexico and Spain and other countries are talking about socialism and even fighting about it, the United States will quietly make it a fact accomplished. I think that your country will be the first actually to practice socialism."

He chuckled at my surprised response to this remark. "Don't be alarmed. I think that the American approach to socialism will be typically American. It will be accomplished with little or no violence. Some Saturday night you will decide to have socialism. And Monday morning, without any noise or excitement, you will be socialists. I think you will repeal capitalism with just as little fuss as you repealed prohibition. You Americans are even more pragmatic than the Romans were. And your working classes have higher standards of education than the world ever saw before."

I had to ask him, of course, about Rockefeller and the murals of Radio City. His smile was indulgent at that question. "Rockefeller was foolish," he said gently. "He did more for socialism than I think he meant to do. Had he left the picture as painted only a few thousand people would have seen it. By removing it he called the attention of millions to it."

I found it strange that a man whose work is so brutal should be personally so suave. He impressed me as being less propagandist than philosopher, less missionary than reporter. A man of limitless energy—he put in more than three years on the frescoes in the ministry of education, often laboring sixteen hours a day and eating his lunches on the scaffold—yet when one meets him he is reposed and tranquil. There is no venom in his speech. He is as tolerant of financiers as he is of other schools of painting. But he is as serenely unshakable as Galileo was in his conviction that the world moves, and that he knows in what direction.

Even in the afterglow, sitting soberly by the typewriter on which I have pounded out so many things that were not so, I think that Diego Rivera is one of the weighty men of our time.

## *Boots and Saddles*

Today, in celebration of my last hours in this deceptive land, I drove over many miles of superb concrete highway to a mountaintop on which are the ruins of an Augustinian monastery. It is called the "Desert of the Lions" — doubtless because it is not a desert and there are no lions. As a matter of fact, the name is not as ridiculous as it sounds. It comes, literally, from being a *deserted* place, once owned by a hermit named Leon.

The concrete highway is the fruit of politics. It is a sort of PWA project, and was built by a statesman who was also in the contracting business. It is a beautiful road, and should, of course, have been built in a region where roads are needed. Those regions, however, do not have the voting strength of the federal district.

And so — boots and saddles! In this day and age, that means changing the oil, watering the battery and filling the gasoline tank. It also means — the tourist traffic being what it is — telegraphing ahead for hotel reservations.

The old notebook is full of things still to be seen and done. But there is no time to do them. The bags must be packed, and places found for the innumerable bits of impedimenta which so mysteriously accumulate on any journey.

No time, now, to take another fling at the lottery and once again test the truth of that giant electric sign on the town's main street, which plays on the cupidity of the visitor with the words, "Get Rich While in Mexico."

That sign, and the swarms of people, young and old, who

appear to make their living on the sale of lottery tickets, epitomize the contradictory character of Mexico. Gambling has been suppressed. The great casinos are closed and shuttered. The police are supposed to break up small games of chance. But the national lottery is encouraged and advertised. It is regarded as a legitimate method of raising funds for the public welfare.

On the face of it, this is true. People have always gambled and doubtless always will. Why not, therefore, turn this foolish habit to good use? The only answer is that the lottery idea has never seemed to work out as well as it theoretically should. On the one hand it has furnished a warm, moist soil for the seeds of corruption, and on the other it has overstimulated the vice of seeking something for nothing. It is an excellent way of separating the fool from his money and putting it to better use than he would; but somehow the defects of the method seem in practice to have outweighed its merits. In my opinion, the income tax is a better method, though more painful and less entertaining.

My last thought as I tie up the loose ends of this sojourn is on the foolish methods of language teaching employed in the United States. I meet so many Mexicans who have learned in their local schools to speak English. I meet few Americans who can speak Spanish.

It seems to me that we have somehow put the cart before the horse. We teach grammar first, writing second, and speech — if at all — a poor last. This is precisely the reverse of what it should be. The child learns his own tongue, first by imitation of sounds, then by writing and lastly — if at all — by the grammar and syntax.

I suppose I am bitter about our methods of language teaching because I am a victim thereof. I “studied” Spanish in

college; but what little I learned is now only a handicap. I know just enough to be afraid of saying the wrong thing.

I wonder, too, why it is that the schools cling to French and German — even to Latin — and give such scant attention to Spanish. Europe was never very close to us, and is now more remote than ever. Central and South America, on the other hand, grow daily closer to us, culturally and economically. Events are forcing this continent into a greater unity than it ever knew before; and Spanish is spoken from Tierra del Fuego to the Cimarron Pass.

English, I think, will be the universal language — if there ever is one. Meanwhile, if one can afford only one auxiliary, I believe it should be Spanish. For those who must travel through life with no speech but their own, there is the old saying that money talks in any tongue.

## *Escorted by the Police*

Never ask anything of a Mexican unless you are prepared to have him give it to you. Mexican generosity can be disconcerting. Yesterday, for example, in a conversation with an influential Mexican friend, I observed that the hardest thing about motor touring was the getting in and out of big cities.

When I returned to my hotel there was a note from him advising me that the Department of Highways and Public Works would provide a guide to conduct me from the capital.

This morning, while it was still dark and the *sereno* was still blowing his little pipe to warn evildoers away, we were awakened by the exhaust of a motorcycle in the street below. It belonged to a captain of police, very smart in spurs, trench coat and polished brasses, who informed us that he had been directed to lead us to the highway and a hundred kilometers beyond. At that point another officer would take up the job.

We protested, but to no avail. Smiling, our captain explained that orders were orders. The Mexican government intended that a guest so distinguished as myself must have every consideration. When I insisted that I was not distinguished at all, the captain merely spoke in courteous terms of my charming modesty.

At each change of guard I made the same protests, and always with the same absence of result. The answer of the escorts was invariably the same. I was an individual of consequence, and it was an honor to be detailed to my protection.

With siren screaming ahead of us, scattering the traffic

like frightened chickens, we whizzed off into the early morning fog. It sounds exciting, and it was; but I must say that driving with a police escort has its drawbacks. There is a mental strain to it, and a sense of sin. You feel under an obligation to keep up with your guide, and you soon find that you cannot stop or even slow down without having him turn around to see what the matter is.

At Jacala we bade an apologetic farewell to our captain, and a new man took us in charge. The transfer brought a crowd of the curious about us. Evidently they thought we were being deported, and one fellow whispered an inquiry as to what crime we had committed.

By this time we were getting resigned to a police escort and could devote our attention to the scenery.

Having heard such horrendous tales about the highway, we were agreeably surprised by what we found. In the nine hundred mile stretch from Mexico City to San Antonio less than 10 per cent is mountainous. It is all perfectly smooth except a patch of some sixty miles, which is graded and paved but not yet surfaced.

The grades are easy — I don't think we ever used low gear. Curves are banked and the edges guarded with parapets of steel or stone. The road is wide and well patrolled. Even a person who enjoys high places as little as I do will find nothing to disturb him. Built by Mexican brains, Mexican money and Mexican labor, it is a superb piece of road-making, and will have profound effect on the social and economic life of this continent.

There are filling stations and good hotels along the route. But, despite what some enthusiasts have said, they are not frequent. As conditions are now, I think a traveler would have more peace of mind with a spare can of gas aboard — and

perhaps oil and water, too. There are long walks between pumps. Also, landslides are likely to be hazards until the mountains settle down to man's trespassing; and the motorist may occasionally find his way blocked for a few hours. For that reason, a thermos bottle and a tin or two of eatables would come in handy.

I hope I don't give the impression that one who takes the Pan-American highway goes into an uncharted wilderness. Nothing of the sort. Even now there is more traffic than one will encounter on many American highroads, and infinitely less danger than on most city boulevards. But running out of gas is never fun even when rarely fatal.

Here in steaming, tropic Valles is a symbol of what is coming—a brand-new hotel, of quite notable excellence, designed, built, decorated and managed by people who never before had anything to do with hotelkeeping—the Osuna family. The father, Gregorio, is a general. The son, Carlos, is a senator. And nephew Tomás, who runs things, was a college professor in the United States. This hotel, the Casa Grande, has been open only two months, but already it is best to wire ahead for reservations.

## *Alone at Last*

The Department of Communications and Public Works collapsed on us this morning. Last night, when the police escort put us to bed, I made the usual unavailing protests at his unnecessary service, and then, resignedly, stated the hour at which I would embark this morning.

He saluted crisply and went off to his headquarters, leaving us alone save for the thousands of American tourists who use Monterrey as a mecca for week-end whoopee.

This morning, however, there was no policeman waiting for us. What to do? Should we wait or should we skip? To skip would be discourteous and might subject us to heaven knew what penalties. So we waited.

At nine thirty there was a telephone call from police headquarters. This day we could chart our course for Laredo unaided. There would be no motorcycle officer blowing his siren and opening his cutout to chase cows and pigs off the road. We were alone at last!

I know the reason. It had been discovered at last that I was not Pat O'Brien, the movie star — just a journalist, and not much of one at that.

One needs no guide on the Pan-American highway. After one leaves the rocks and pines of the mountains the course is flat and straightaway, with no crossroads. One can shoot through the coffee and bananas and the long stretches of empty desert as fast as his car will go.

It was not always thus. Last night I listened for an hour to Colonel "Bill" Furlong, the man who for years preached

the gospel of this highway to a skeptical world and now, at last, sees his dream come true. The recital of his experiences made little chills run up my back. It must have taken nerve and plenty of it to drive over this road when it was abuilding.

It is all but finished now, and the thrills are gone. So Furlong, seeking new worlds to conquer, was on his way to survey the prospects to Oaxaca and beyond. He believes that he will live to see the day when one will be able to drive straight through to Buenos Aires with as little hazard or discomfort as one faces now in the drive to Mexico City.

Speeding over the flat miles toward home, I have time to read the mail which has accumulated during these last busy weeks and remained largely unopened.

Several letters pluck the same strings. Now that I am leaving Mexico, getting away from propaganda and the fear of censorship, will I have the courage to tell the truth about what I have seen and heard? Once safely across the border, these friends remind me, I can let go and say what is what.

Alas, I have nothing to add. Nothing has been saved for revelation when I reach my native soil. Doubtless I have left much unsaid because there is much I have not seen and more I have not understood. But of concealment, for reasons of fear or of favor, there has been none.

And as for my observations having been colored by the attentions of the government, the only attention the government has shown me has been the motorcycle escort of the last two days. I have heard tales of what happens to people who write what the government does not like, but as far as my own experience goes these remain only tales.

And so, Mexico — *hasta la vista*. You have puzzled and bewildered me. You have alarmed me, because what you are doing gives a somewhat disturbing picture of what may

be ahead for my own country. But one statement admits of no qualification — you have been unfailingly agreeable.

I shall wave behind me as I cross the Rio Grande, and I shall whisper "*adiocito*" — a little good-by, not a big one; for I hope some day to return.























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